Alberta

MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS

Innovative Housing Grants Program

# OUTDOOR MAINTENANCE ADAPTATIONS FOR A SENIOR'S HOME

MARCH 1991

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The views and conclusions expressed and the recommendations made in this report are entirely those of the authors and should not be construed as expressing the opinions of Alberta Municipal Affairs.

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## FOREWORD

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# Executive Summary

Numerous studies indicate that when confronted with choices concerning retirement housing, many seniors prefer to remain in their homes and to a lesser degree, their own neighbourhoods where they have developed a personal support system of friends. The knowledge of local shops, the familiarity of a neighbourhood, trusted local tradespeople and access to medical attention provide a secure and comfortable feeling for many people who choose to remain in familiar surroundings. Despite this, many seniors find that the burden of maintenance associated with these homes can become an insurmountable obstacle to their independence. In fact, many seniors cite maintenance as the primary reason they are forced into institutional forms of housing.

**Objectives of the Study**

The objective of this project was to develop a manual of maintenance strategies that seniors could pursue as a means to continued, independent well-being in their own homes. The detailed objectives included:

- identifying those elements of outdoor maintenance work that are viewed by seniors who live in single family residences as being onerous, and contributing to their decision to seek alternate accommodation;

- identifying and evaluating alternate exterior building materials, appropriate landscape designs, and maintenance strategies, that are both cost effective and easy to maintain; and

- preparing a consumer-oriented illustrated report on the findings.

**Methodology Used**

Research for this report included extensive literature review, interviews with senior homeowners, a landscape contractor, nurseryman, a home maintenance consultant, senior citizen agencies and knowledgeable individuals.

**Key Issues of the Work**

In response to the aging of our society, support programs and innovative housing options have been implemented to assist in the long term independence of seniors. Despite these numerous and diverse efforts, a recently published report entitled, "Ownership Retirement Housing Projects in Alberta", (Romank, L.), cite home maintenance as one of the major factors that determine whether a senior will decide to sell his/her home in favour of more supportive and often subsidized housing options.

This study was prepared to identify adaptations that a senior can make to his/her outdoor landscaping to reduce home maintenance requirements, provide easier access and enable the senior to continue to live independently.

**Main Findings**

A disability or a deteriorating health condition may prevent the homeowner from maintaining their property in a way they were previously accustomed to. Further, outdoor landscape changes or exterior building modifications are often necessitated by senior's changing needs.

This report provides suggestions that can assist seniors in making decisions about outdoor adaptations when they become necessary, to provide a safer, and more accessible environment. While the emphasis is on adaptations for easier outdoor maintenance, the general principles outlined will be of assistance to people of increasing age or people with physical disabilities. However, the various outdoor adaptations noted do not apply to all home maintenance situations, and outdoor modifications must be assessed on an individual basis for each lot and for each senior.

**Conclusions**

Much of the previous research on senior citizen housing needs has dealt with alternative types of accommodation, but generally did not investigate ways that a senior can remain in the home. This report acknowledges that many seniors want to stay in their own homes, but only if the burden of home maintenance is lessened.

In some respects, making landscape modifications or exterior building changes can be best planned in advance of retirement. Modifications could then be made by the individual or by a contractor, without the financial strain or work burden sometimes associated with retirement. Seniors however, are urged to assess their needs and property situation before any landscape modifications or exterior renovations taken place. It is important that this personal assessment look at the present physical abilities of the individual, and also the possible future inabilities to facilitate a senior's continued independent living.

# ONE
# Introduction

*Figure 1: Seniors Maintaining Their Yard*

One of the main reasons why seniors decide to move is that they can no longer maintain the standard of care their homes once displayed. Although there is no yard or building that is totally maintenance free, outdoor areas can be modified not only to allow for easier care but to ensure a safer and more accessible environment.

The purpose of this project was to identify those adaptations that a senior can make to his/her existing outdoor landscaping or building exterior to reduce home maintenance. Also featured are outdoor adaptations that enable easier access or assist in the continued independence of seniors.

To develop a usable resource guide that may assist seniors with maintenance tasks, the following objectives were formulated:

- identify those elements of outdoor maintenance which are deemed onerous by seniors who live in single family residences and contribute to their decision to seek alternate accommodation.
- identify and evaluate alternate exterior building materials, appropriate landscape designs and maintenance strategies which are both cost-effective and easy to maintain.
- prepare a consumer-oriented illustrated report on the project findings.

This research was based on previous literature studies such as, "The Over-Forty Society" (Wigdor & Foot, 1988), "Ownership Retirement Housing Projects in Alberta" (Romank, 1987), "A Senior's Home Designs for Independent Living" (Whiting & Woodwark, 1985), and interviews with several senior support groups, (see Appendix I for a list of agencies in Alberta). In addition, studies of related fields, and discussions with people directly involved with home maintenance procedures were conducted.

Seniors cited a number of recurring concerns related to outdoor maintenance:

**Health Problems**
The demands of outdoor maintenance become a significant burden if health is a problem. Health concerns can range from general weakness, fatigue, hearing and vision loss, arthritis or rheumatism to a decreasing tolerance to extremes in temperature.

**Retirement Communities**
Many seniors find the features offered by a retirement community or lodge an attractive alternative because they feel insecure and vulnerable remaining in their homes. Although most retirement communities have an attractive purchasing package, the cost of purchasing one of these homes may be more expensive than the return on a presently owned home. Monthly maintenance charges are an additional expense and can cost as much as one might spend on maintaining an existing home.

**Access and Security**
As a person's physical ability deteriorates, access around the home may become difficult. Seniors are concerned about falling when accessing the home, and want information on outdoor support structures to assist with their mobility (ie: handrails and ramps). Seniors can also feel insecure in their homes, and the appropriate home security measures related to product selection and construction costs can be overwhelming, if knowledge is limited.

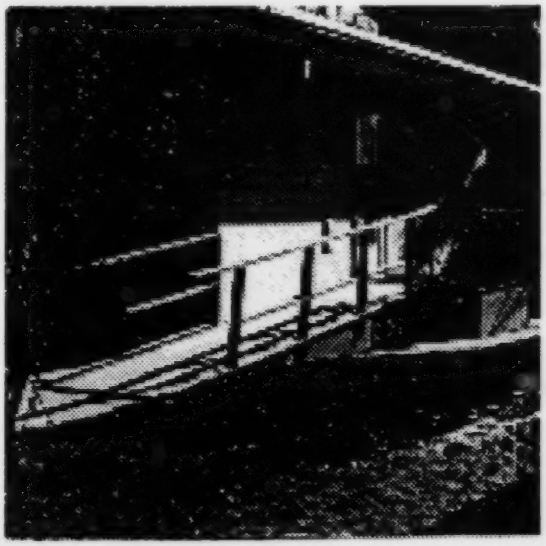

*Figure 2: Wooden Wheelchair Ramp*

**Gardening Versus Outdoor Maintenance**
Most seniors like to garden but do not have the desire or capability to do a lot of outdoor work. It was found that seniors would like to have the opportunity to hire inexpensive landscape and maintenance companies but they are concerned about the level of services available.

Since outdoor maintenance continues throughout the year, seniors are also concerned about being taken advantage of if yard work is contracted out.

Seniors are generally not keen on becoming contract managers. There are suggestions later in the report regarding methods that one can adopt to ease the more costly maintenance adaptations.

There are also several community programs and senior citizen organizations throughout Alberta which can assist with outdoor maintenance tasks. Reference has been made to several senior support services in larger cities (see Appendix I), and it is strongly recommended that seniors contact their local municipalities to find out more about the services that are available.

**Report Organization**
The remainder of this report is organized into five sections that deal with the following topics:

i) Landscape Maintenance - outlines easier ways to care for an existing landscape, the equipment necessary, and associated purchasing costs;

ii) Exterior Building Maintenance - suggests preventative measures to prolong the time between building maintenance tasks;

iii) Adaptations for Easier Outdoor Use - outlines access concerns, and ways to promote movement outdoors and improve security;

iv) Adaptations for Special Needs - identifies outdoor modifications for the visually impaired and semi-ambulatory; and

v) Construction provides guidelines for the do-it-yourself versus hiring a contractor approach.

In addition, the appendices is divided into five sections that contain supplemental information on the following topics:

i) Seniors Support Services,

ii) Landscape Maintenance Guidelines,

iii) Cost of Landscape Materials,

iv) Low Maintenance Plant Material,

v) Home Improvements - Hiring A Contractor.

# TWO

# Landscape Maintenance

Although there is no yard or building that is totally maintenance free, outdoor areas can be modified not only to allow for easier care but to ensure a safer and more accessible outdoor environment. One of the main reasons why seniors decide to move is that they can no longer maintain the standard of care their homes once displayed.

This project evolved from two previous studies funded by Alberta Municipal Affairs, that dealt specifically with interior home renovations and modifications to assist the senior with indoor living (refer to the Bibliography on page 28 for publications by: Whiting & Woodwark, 1985; and Regenstreif & Bennett, 1989).

This study addresses the outdoor areas of a home that can be modified to meet the changing needs and physical capabilities of an elderly person. Yard adaptations can be done over an extended period of time with materials being purchased as they are needed or when they can be afforded, to reduce the burden of a large renovation or re-landscaping cost.

Outlined below are suggested strategies specific to outdoor maintenance tasks and equipment, to assist seniors who may be considering landscape modifications or equipment purchases.

## 2.1 Lawn Maintenance

1. Lawn maintenance can be reduced by replacing existing sections of the lawn with a hard surfaced area such as a walkway, a patio or a raised deck.
2. Dog urination will burn a lawn leaving patches of brown grass. Soaking the areas with water to leach out the nitrogen will bring back the grass, and generally eliminates the need to replace the turf.
3. Grass trimming around planting beds and walk ways can be eliminated by installing an edging material between the grass and these areas. Hard surface mowing edges such as boards, bricks or concrete help control the spread of grass and weeds into other areas of the yard and allow for easier lawn mowing as the mower runs smoothly over the edge. Edge trims will not need replacement for several years.

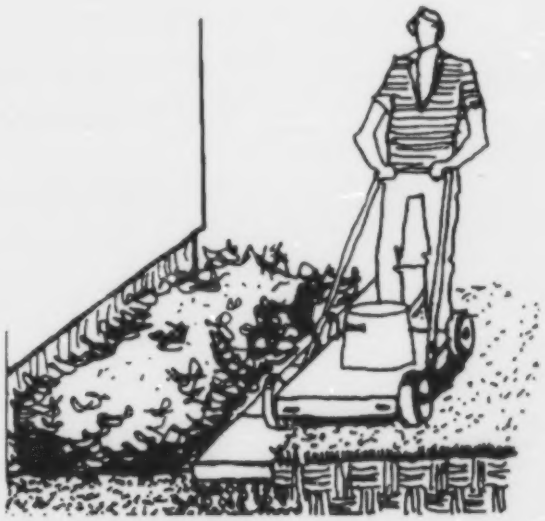

*Figure 3: Concrete Edging*

4. Hard to reach corners of the lawn may be replaced with a low spreading ground cover such as a Juniper species or a perennial such as Cerastium tomontosum (Snow in Summer), to eliminate the difficult task of mowing or trimming grass in that area.

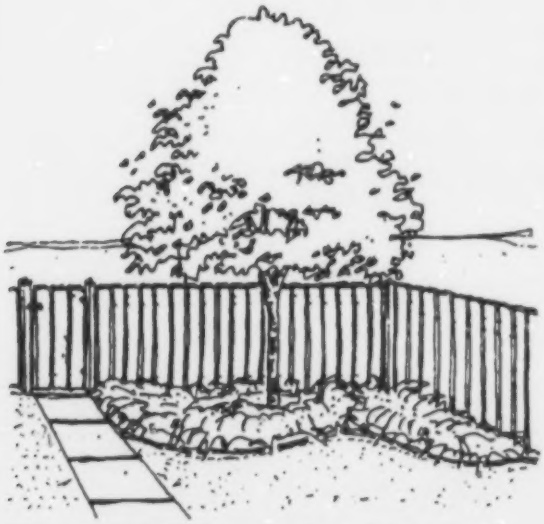

*Figure 4: Low Maintenance Ground Cover*

An alternative to the difficult task of bending and stooping to trim grass around trees, is to remove the grass around the bottom of the tree. Installing plastic edging and filling the area with a natural mulch, such as wood chips or shale, will ensure that water can still reach the root system of the tree.

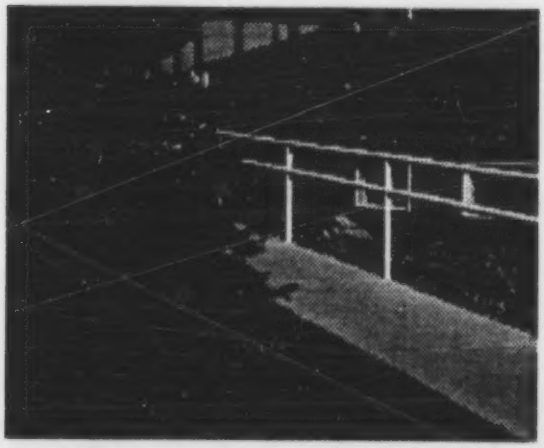

*Figure 5: Low Maintenance Shale and Plastic Edging*

5. Replacing grass with native shrubs will also reduce lawn maintenance as these shrubs require less care, watering and pruning once they are established. (refer to Appendix IV for a list of low maintenance plant material).

**Lawn Equipment**

The basic factors to consider when purchasing any type of gardening equipment are the strength and ability required to operate such equipment and whether the equipment selected will do the job.

1. Lawn mowers are available in all shapes, sizes and price ranges but there are basically four types :

a) Self-propelled gas mowers move on their own power and are generally equiped with electric starters. This equipment tends to be heavy and is particularly cumbersome for use on a small property. The average cost is approximately $500.

b) Electric mowers are easy to start and weigh substantially less than gas mowers. These machines are not usually self-propelled and extra caution must be taken to ensure that the mower cord is not cut during operation. The average price for this type of mower is approximately $275.

c) Ride on mowers are best for large properties but require regular maintenance. They are not recommended on steep slopes or for operators with poor eyesight or balance problems. A two year parts and labour warranty is usually offered with every new purchase. The average cost is approximately $2,800.

d) Lightweight push mowers ( 5 kg/11 lb), are inexpensive, but may be difficult to push if the grass is not kept short. They are relatively simple to maintain, easy to manoeuvre, and are suggested for a small property. The average cost is approximately $140.

2) A raking device can be installed on a mower blade, to "de-thatch" the lawn while cutting the grass. It is recommended that the grass clipping bag be emptied frequently, as it is difficult to lift a full bag of grass clippings. The average price for this type of attachment is approximately $8.

3) The easiest and most efficient way to trim a hedge is with an electric hedge trimmer. Average cost is approximately $60. Where lawn edge strips are not used, new electric trimmers provide a guided sled that prevents the operator from cutting the grass too short. Average cost is approximately $42.

## 2.2 Watering and Irrigation Systems

A watering system, whether it is below or above ground, must be efficient and effective. Above-ground sprinklers and hoses are now light weight and are relatively inexpensive. Buried systems, (although somewhat expensive) are convenient and generally reliable.

**Equipment**

1. Snap on hose couplings for garden watering attachments make changing from a garden sprayer to a sprinkler an easy operation. Average cost is approximately $10.

2. Garden hose guns with adjustable multi-purpose heads are effective for many types of watering as are the long handled spray attachments that eliminate the need to extend ones reach. Rubber perforated soaker hoses are more flexible than plastic hoses and allow a steady application of water to be placed on the garden or shrub bed. On average, spray attachments are $12 each, while the rubber perforated soaker hose is approximately $25, for a 15 m (50 ft) length.

3. Garden hose reel carts made of lightweight metal are an easy and comfortable way to store and transport water hoses around the home. Average price is approximately $60.

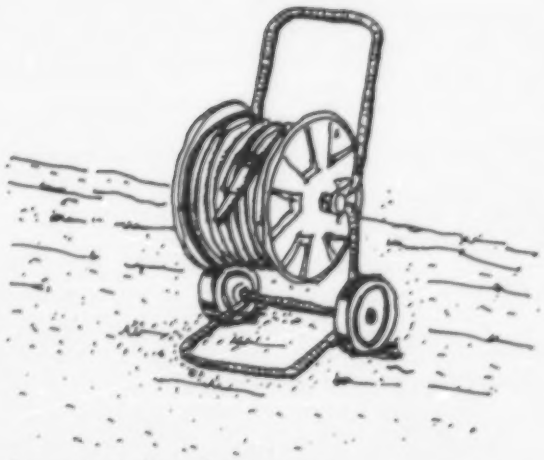

*Figure 6: Lightweight Hose Cart*

4. Irrigation systems with fully automatic computerized water control are a convenient way to water. These systems represent an excellent maintenance reducing feature and although somewhat expensive, they can greatly simplify the lawn watering burden and thus warrant consideration.

It is essential that the system be installed by a reliable professional company that can ensure maintenance and guaranteed service of the system. Usually, no additional maintenance fee is charged to have the system winterized (pipes blown out) in the first year.

A system that will service a 15 x 36.5 m (50 x 120 ft) property will cost approximately $1,500 - $2,000 fully installed, with a one year maintenance guarantee. Subsequent maintenance fees will be approximately $100 per year and includes: spring set up of water timer and controls, irrigation head inspection, and fall shut down that blows the water out of the irrigation lines.

## 2.3 Weeding

1. Annual and perennial flower beds will benefit from weed barriers that can be installed by spreading a layer of mulch, gravel or shale on top of the ground. This makes tending the beds easier as less bending and stooping is required.

2. Ground cover plants act as weed barriers, require little maintenance, and will spread in areas that may be hard to maintain. However, before ground cover plants are installed, the area must be dug to a depth of 450 mm (18 in) to insure that the root systems of existing weeds have been removed.

**Weeding Aids**

1. Weeds in shrub beds can be reduced by installing a specially manufactured porous fabric that allows the shrubs to continue to grow through holes cut in the material. The fabric is placed approximately 75 mm (3 in) below grade and can be cut away as the plant spreads. A "weed barrier" mulch, (such as gravel or wood chips) is then placed on top of this fabric. Water can still percolate through to the root system of the plant and helps retain ground moisture. The"filter fabric" is approximately $5 per linear metre.

*Figure 7: Weed Resistant Filter Fabric*

2. Knee pads or cushions can be a comfortable aid when installing a weed fabric or working at ground level. Knee pads are made of spongy rubber with adjustable straps to keep them securely in place. Average cost is $30.

3. The kneeling cushion has a sturdy tubular steel frame that allows a person to lower and push oneself back up without strain. This item also acts as a convenient seat by turning the frame over. Average cost is $75.

## 2.4 Pruning and Fertilizing

1. Trees and shrubs that require a great deal of care can be replaced with native, hardy plant material such as Green Ash, (Fraxinus pennsylvanica) or May Day, (Prunus padus commutata); Potentilla, (Potentilla sp.) and Alpine Currant, (Ribes alpinum) that generally grow well in Alberta. These plants require less pruning, water, and fertilizer;

   However, before any new plant material is purchased, the Alberta Horticultural Guide should be consulted. The province is separated into different plant hardiness zones and suitable plant material may differ from one zone to the other.

2. Plant dwarf or smaller fruit tree varieties as they are easier to prune and do not reach the standard height of conventional fruit trees.

3. Trees and shrubs trained to grow in a particular shape (espaliered) on a trellis or against a wall, may require more pruning but because they are usually within a persons reach, they tend to be easier to maintain. These plants may also be utilized as a vision screen or as a garden feature.

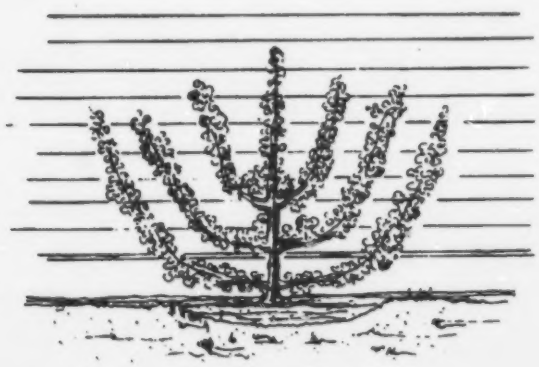

*Figure 8: Espaliered Fruit Tree*

**Pruning and Fertilizing Equipment**

1. Pole pruning tools are available with specially shaped handles to reach up to 3 metres (10 ft), and provide a comfortable, more secure grip. Average cost is approximately $30.

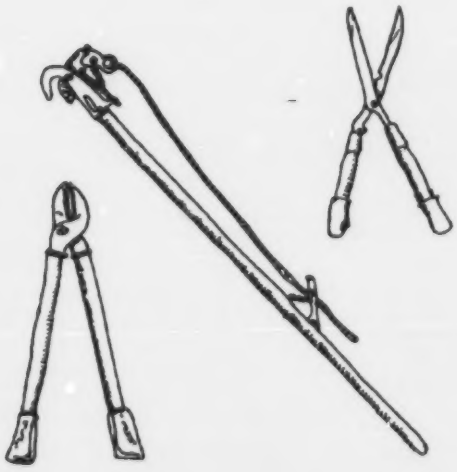

*Figure 9: Pruning Tools with Padded Handles*

2. Fertilizing capsules fitted into a garden hose attachment are sprayed directly through the outgoing water supply. There is no need to use heavy pump action spray bottles or carry heavy bags of fertilizer. Average price for the hose attachment is $15.
3. Another fertilizing alternative for trees and shrubs is to purchase a siphon mixer (Syphonex is one brand name). Fertilizing pellets are added to a bucket of water at the outside tap, where a brass connector from the tap runs a thin hose to the bucket. When the water is turned on, the fertilizer mixture is siphoned up through the garden hose. With this method, no heavy lifting of water buckets or bottles is necessary as the bucket stays stationary at the tap location. Cost for the siphon mixer is approximately $20.

Fertilizing sticks or spikes are recommended only if the soil is light and porous.

## 2.5 Leaf Removal

Removing large branches that overhang roof and eaves troughs will reduce leaf build up in the eaves and prevent branches from damaging the roof. In heavily treed areas, screens placed over the eaves will help control leaf build up.

**Leaf Removal Equipment**

1. Lightweight rakes and shovels aid in leaf gathering and range from $10 - $20.
2. Gathering leaves is made easier by using an aluminium or wooden frame cart that contains a large bag inserted in the centre. Once the bag is full, it can be tied and wheeled to the garbage area. This system is inexpensive, and the work can be done alone. There are different types of carts available at most garden centres or one can improvise by using a hand pulled grocery cart. The average price is approximately $25.
3. Electric mulching machines shred leaves and twigs for compost use or reduced garbage volume. The average price is approximately $500.
4. Electric leaf blowers can also be used to vacuum leaves into an attached bag. These are recommended for heavily treed areas and are approximately $90.

5. Leaf and grass cuttings can be used in the production of compost. The easiest way to compost is to use an aluminium drum that sits on a pedestal. This drum can be easily turned each day to allow for a proper mix of air and material. Average cost is approximately $170.

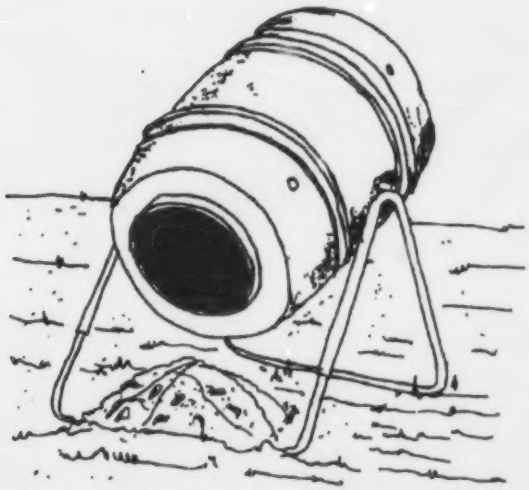

*Figure 10: Lightweight Compost Mixer*

## 2.6 Snow Removal

1. When contemplating a new pathway, remember that it is easier to shovel snow from paths and walk ways if they are not against buildings, walls or fences as the snow can then be pushed or lifted to either side.
2. Covered walk ways may keep some snow and ice off steps and pathways but they may not stop snow from blowing onto these areas.
3. Utilize hard surfaces to store snow where ever possible so that plant material is not damaged by the weight of snow or by any salt that may have accumulated from a roadway.

**Snow Removal Equipment**

1. The "No Strain" snow shovel with a non-stick polyethylene blade and a tubular "D" - grip handle reduces strain/bending and appears to be the easiest to use manual shovel. The average price is approximately $16.

*Figure 11: No Strain "D" Grip Snow Shovel*

2. In areas that receive heavy, deep snowfalls, snow blowing equipment is a good investment; gas snow blowers are usually self -propelled but are heavy (39 kilos/85 lbs) and cost approximately $1,000.
3. Where snow fall is minimal, an electric broom that blows light snow from pathways and steps is a convenient tool. Average cost is approximately $130.

## 2.7 Fencing

Fencing provides enclosure, security, visual screening and protection from wind but unfortunately, fencing material does not last forever.

1. When replacing a fence, the posts and rails are considered the most important parts of the structure. The fence post material should consist of a pressure treated wood set in concrete, with at least 2/5 of the

total length below grade level to insure post stability.

2. Wooden slats can be placed close to ground level to reduce weeds and prevent animals from entering the yard

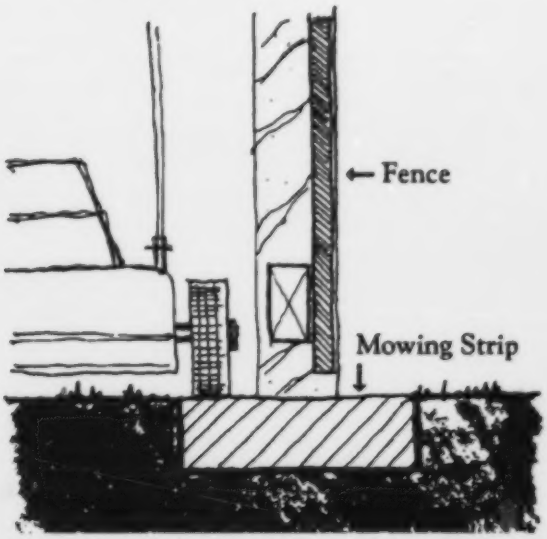


*Figure 12: Wooden Fence Edge to Reduce Weeds and Grass Trimming*

3. Inspect the fence every 2 to 3 months to check for minor repairs and to straighten or replace damaged or rotting slats. Keeping the fence painted will help protect the structure from moisture damage.

For the number of times landscape maintenance is necessary, landscape guidelines and a list of estimated costs can be found in Appendix II and III.

## 2.8 Low Maintenance Gardening

Many people get a great deal of pleasure from tending a flower or vegetable garden but have no desire to do a lot of yard work. There are many new inexpensive products and techniques that can assist the senior with gardening tasks, and plant material selection.

**1. Reduce Planting Beds**

i) Existing planting beds at grade can be adapted to have a more informal approach, whereby plants are grouped in irregular patterns that simulates a more natural-looking landscape. Not only is wildlife attracted to these areas for shelter, food and safety, but pruning is minimal because the natural characteristics of the plant are maintained.

ii) Creating accent plants or planting features throughout the yard by reducing or eliminating large planting beds, (or lawn) can be a very attractive and easy way to reduce lawn maintenance.

*Figure 13: Low Maintenance Accent Planting*

**2. Raise Planting Beds**

i) When gardening becomes a difficult task, raised planters can be installed to minimize bending and stooping. Depending on the height of a person, planters can range between 500-900 mm (1.5 - 3.0 ft.) and provide an attractive visual feature in the garden.

ii) Raised planting beds with seating along the sides will enable the senior to rest when required. Ensure that the seat height is adequate for both comfortable sitting and reaching. Raised planters wider than 1 metre (3.28 ft.) are difficult to work in and maintain.

iii) Plants and flowers can also be enjoyed from the indoors when raised beds are situated close to windows or patio doors.

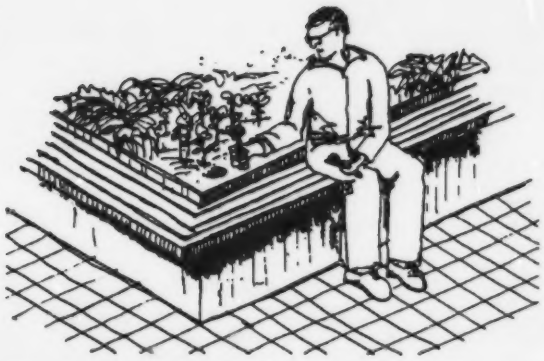

*Figure 14: Raised Wooden Planter with Seat*

## 2.9 Plants for Low Maintenance

1. Flowers and vegetables grown together (edible landscapes) make attractive displays either at ground level, in raised beds or grown in containers, (ie. tomato plants with a border of marigolds).
2. A wild flower area may be a welcome alternative to many grassed or planted beds since it only has to be cut once a year. However, establishment can be difficult if the growing environment is not appropriate (check with your local nursery or garden centre).
3. Fruiting plants grown in containers are convenient, but require frequent watering in warm weather as the soil tends to dry out quickly.
4. Plant perennials rather than annual plants to avoid re-planting each year, (although most perennials will need to be divided every few years).
5. Introduce native plant material that does not require a lot of water (xeriscaping), to reduce maintenance and home water consumption.
6. Plants that produce berries and seeds, or trees that have a tendency to loose branches should not be located near pathways as these areas can become slippery or hazardous due to fallen debris.
7. Coniferous trees and shrubs (evergreens that do not loose their leaves in the fall) will reduce the annual removal of fallen leaves, while larger leaves are easier to remove from the garden than small leaves.

A list of low maintenance plant material can be found in Appendix IV of this report. It should be noted that climate and soil conditions will dictate the type of species one can grow in a specific landscape. For further information consult local nurseries, gardening publications and the Alberta Horticultural Guide that is distributed free by Alberta Agriculture (see Bibliography for reference).

# THREE

# Exterior Building Maintenance

Most people would generally agree that home maintenance can be an onerous task and many seniors do not necessarily want to, or may not be capable of doing a lot of exterior building work. Keeping on top of outdoor maintenance as a preventive measure will save time and money over the long term as upgrades will not become major undertakings.

Before any modifications take place however, the senior should assess his/her needs and long term physical and financial capabilities in order to choose the appropriate renovations necessary to facilitate their continued independent living.

This section outlines specific areas of the home that should be checked regularly and suggests preventative maintenance measures to keep repair bills at a minimum.

## 3.1 Surface Drainage and Building Foundations

Surface water must drain away from the house but not onto neighbouring property. If the property is relatively flat, it is sometimes difficult to achieve good surface drainage; however, if moisture is allowed to collect next to the foundation, it can seep down the walls and possibly into the basement. This may cause damage to the exterior foundation walls, invite roots to follow the water trail and, over time, cause damage to both the exterior and interior surfaces of the foundation. Methods to control surface drainage include:

1. Adding top soil around the building to raise the land in low areas, most of the surface moisture will be directed away from the foundation.

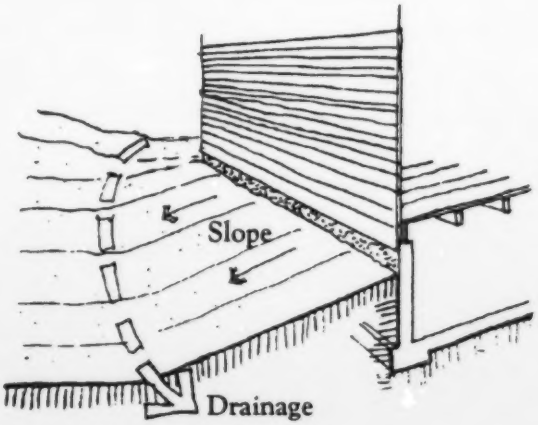


*Figure 15: Sloping Soil to Direct Moisture Away from the Building Foundation*

2. Raising ground levels to ensure that soil does not come in contact with exterior siding or any wood frame members of the structure. Approximately 15 cm (6 in) should be left between the top of the ground and the top of the foundation to meet local building code requirements.

## 3.2 Siding

1. When replacing exterior siding, the material chosen should be long lasting and maintenance free in terms of the likelihood of repairs, painting and staining. Properly installed vinyl or aluminum siding and some stucco applications offer low maintenance and reasonable longevity.

2. Maintenance of existing wood siding can be reduced by ensuring gaps, cracks and knot holes are properly sealed and the surface is painted or stained with a good quality product. This treatment will ensure a good seal that should have a three to five year longevity.

## 3.3 Outside Water Taps

Exterior water taps must be winterized prior to freezing temperatures. If this is forgotten, frozen pipes can burst, but may not leak until the line thaws. There are two systems for winterizing outside taps:

1. The most common system in older homes is a shut off valve inside the house near the location of the exterior tap. For this to work properly the inside shut-off valve must first be turned off, then the exterior water valve must be opened to allow the water to drain. There will be a small drain cock on the interior valve which can then be opened, allowing the remaining water to drip out and completely drain the pipe. It is important to leave the exterior tap open all winter while the interior valve is shut-off.

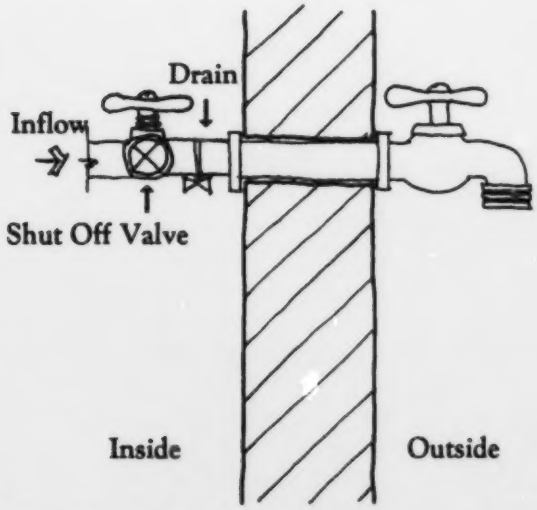


*Figure 16: Shut-Off Valve Assembly*

2. The second system, can be easily installed and uses a "frost free valve assembly" which controls water flow approximately 30 cm (12 in) in from the exterior surface. In other words, the actual shut-off mechanism is located inside the building rather than at the outside tap.

   With this configuration you do not even need to winterize your taps and they can be left pressurized for year round convenience. However, it is important to ensure that the tap is shut off completely, as a leaky tap will freeze and burst the pipe.

   In both cases noted, garden hoses should be removed to ensure that the tap drains properly.

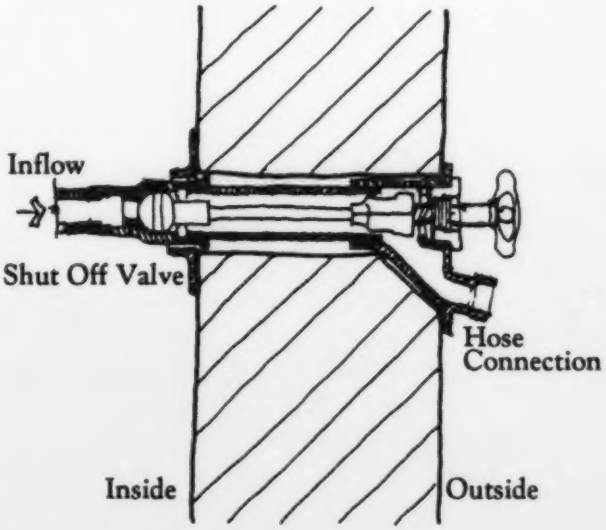


*Figure 17: Frost Free Valve Assembly*

3. New tap designs are available (contact your local plumber), that allow the water to be shut off by turning a lever rather than a circular handle. This requires less hand motion and less strain for those who suffer from arthritis or weak wrists.

## 3.4 Windows

1. The early stages of seal failure in thermal windows may not be noticeable or identifiable unless specific temperature and humidity conditions are present. Failed or broken seals are usually indicated when

condensation droplets appear between the joined glass panels. The only way to remedy this situation is to replace the glass unit, and while replacement of the window(s) is not critical, visual appearance may be of concern.

2. New sealed units can be installed to avoid the nuisance of annual removal and replacement of separate storm windows. Operable units can be purchased which open inward for easy cleaning.
3. Wood window frames left in place, can be improved by capping with aluminum to eliminate future deterioration and maintenance. If choosing this option, the wood frames should first be painted with an oil-based paint. Care should be taken to ensure good quality workmanship in the capping process and it requires an experienced tradesman to do the job properly, (refer to Appendix V - Hiring a Contractor).
4. Clip on storm windows are difficult to install and their continual removal and replacement tends to break the clips, thus necessitating frequent repair.
5. A temporary alternative to storm widows is to use a plastic film stretched across the interior side of the window frame. Installation requires that you place double sided tape on the window frames and stretch the material over the tape. This is then tightened by blowing warm air over the film with a hair-dryer. The window cannot be opened unless the plastic seal is broken, and removal may take the paint off your window frames.
6. When purchasing new windows, quality should be the first consideration. Thermal glass panels have differing manufacturer's warranties, which can range between two and ten years, although many such windows will hold their seals in excess of twenty five years.
7. When changing from one type of window to another, it is always best to try and use the existing openings in the walls to preclude the need for expensive structural changes.
8. After installing new windows, heating bills are usually reduced and home security is increased as tight fitting, secure locking windows are harder to open. Windows that push out, swivel or rotate are easiest to clean but will be more expensive initially.
9. Windows that wind out are the most expensive and all moveable hardware must be kept well lubricated. Top quality thermal sealed windows are an intermediate cost option and horizontal sliding windows are the cheapest.

## 3.5 Eaves and Downpipes

1. As a regular maintenance function, eavetroughs should be cleaned annually to reduce debris that advances corrosion and restricts drainage. All joints should be re-sealed with silicone caulking whenever necessary to prevent leakage.
2. It is important to ensure that eavetrough downpipes do not: obstruct a pathway, discharge water next to the house foundation, or, run underneath a pathway. A plastic hose attachment should not be used at the downspout, as it tends to clog with leaves and does not provide adequate drainage.

To eliminate situations of this type, down-pipes can be:

i) Rerouted to an overhead pipe connected to either a fence or a 4 x 4 support post. This connection will allow water to drain off the roof, through the downspout and away from the house.

ii) Have the downpipe connection run from the eave (supported by a post) to the top of a fence stringer, that will then run along the fence and drain into a remote shrub bed.

## 3.6 Roofing

1. Early detection and replacement of deteriorating roofing will save money over the long term. Roofing on the south side of the house will usually deteriorate faster because of longer exposure to the sun.
2. Flat roofs should be checked every year to ensure that the scuppers are freely draining and there are no cracks in the tar and gravel base.

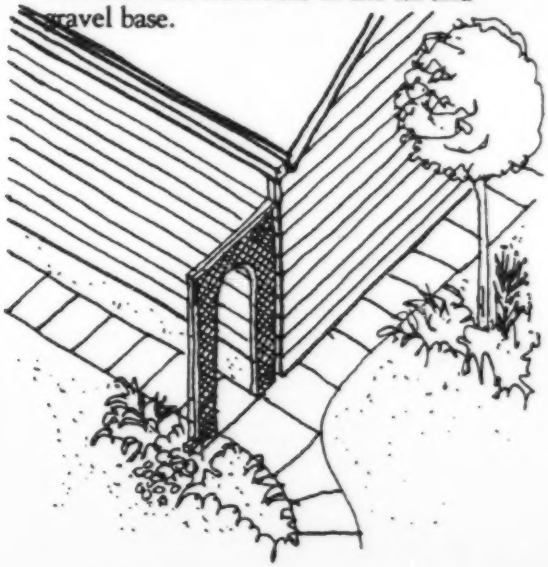

*Figure 18: The Side Entry Trellis Keeps the Downpipe off the Pathway*

3 When contracting a roof replacement; interlocking asphalt tab shingles can be purchased with a 10, 15, or 25 year guarantee (for as long as you own your home). The quality and thickness of a roofing shingle determines the length of the guarantee.

## 3.7 Garages

1. The same exterior checks listed for home maintenance, such as surface drainage, siding, and roofing, should be done for the garage.
2. An electric garage door opener eliminates the need to get out of the car and saves a lot of effort. When purchasing an opener, insure there is a built-in safety mechanism. This allows the door to roll back up if it comes in contact with a vehicle or another object, or if there is a malfunction of the electrical components.
3. The door tracks and rollers should be adjusted and lubricated annually to ensure safe operation.

# FOUR

# Adaptations for Easier Outdoor Use

Accessibility is another factor that seniors will want to consider when making property modifications. Chapter two dealt with strategies for general outdoor maintenance while this section deals with adaptations that respond to specific physical disabilities.

It should be noted that additions or modifications to a building will generally require a building permit and in some cases a development permit. Identifying property line locations can usually be obtained from the legal survey accompanying a property mortgage. This information may be required when constructing structures such as a new fence or a wheel chair ramp. Check with your local building department to ensure that the proper permits have been applied for and approved, prior to construction.

## 4.1 General Needs

Before any changes to a property are made, the home owner should evaluate the outdoor landscape and analyse the existing site conditions. A site analysis can be documented in plan or sketch form and should consider sun and shade patterns, prevailing winds, neighbouring properties and existing areas of outdoor use. The condition of soil and how trees and shrubs relate to the site and any neighbouring structures, needs to be taken into consideration prior to finalizing any decisions.

For example, recognizing that poor drainage or steep site grades may increase the cost of construction is useful information to have during the initial stages of planning. To maximize yard opportunities and minimize costs, this exercise should be completed before design or construction begins.

The analysis or "physical reality" of the property should consider the following:

- sun patterns,
- summer and winter prevailing winds,
- micro-climates (ie: south exposure),
- privacy from surrounding neighbours,
- views to and from the site,
- private and public areas,
- drainage problems,
- soil conditions,
- access to storage areas
- location of utility services, and
- existing trees and shrubs.

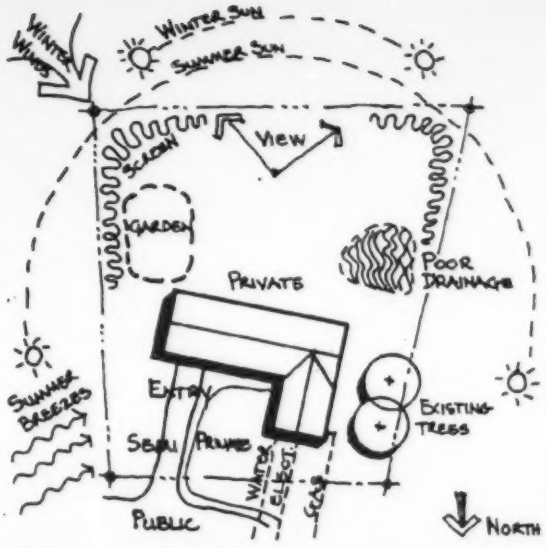


*Figure 19: A Typical Site Analysis Plan*

## 4.2 Exterior Walkways and Surfaces

The following features allow for safe, easy access and greater enjoyment of the outdoors with minimal landscape maintenance. Refer to Section 5.0, page 21 for information pertaining to seniors with special needs.

1. All surfaces should be well drained; and minor changes in level should have an easy gradient of 1:20 (in order to rise one metre in height a pathway of 20 metres in length should be provided). Surfaces can be sandblasted to acquire a roughened non-slip area.
2. Indoor-outdoor carpet can reduce a slippery surface, but if not properly installed, there is a tendency for the carpet to curl or loosen which may cause people to trip or fall. This type of carpet can also hold moisture and in parts of Alberta where Chinook winds are frequent, the freeze and thaw condition can create a very slippery surface and cause the concrete steps underneath to spall (break up, flake or chip).
3. Walkways of interlocking pavers are generally not recommended if installation cannot be guaranteed. This type of surface has a tendency to lift up easily, become uneven, creates a hazard for walking, and makes snow shovelling difficult.
4. Parking areas should be hard surfaced and have a direct pathway to the house for easier accessibility.

## 4.3 Steps and Handrails

1. For safety, changes in level should be eliminated whenever possible. If this cannot be avoided; lights, handrails, or a marked change in the surface material will decrease the danger of tripping or falling.
2. Handrails should be installed on both sides of any steps for added safety, and should be marked or brightly coloured to increase their visibility.
3. The recommended height of a handrail, is 900 mm (3 ft.) from the ground to the top of the rail. Handrails should extend, 300 mm (1 ft.) at both ends of the rail and return to the wall, ground, or a post for extra stability.

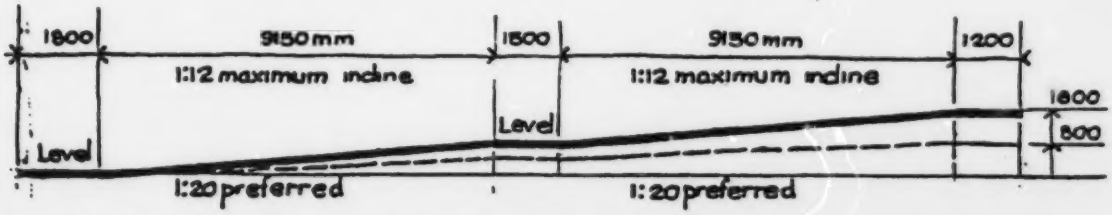


*Figure 20: A Residential Ramp (Regenstreif, A. & Bennett, R, 1989, p.9)*

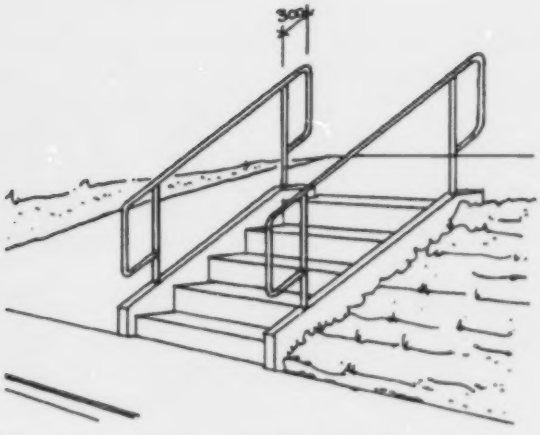

*Figure 21: Steps with Handrails on Both Sides*

4. Standard steps can be replaced with lower risers and wider runs to enable easier access.
5. Non-slip edge strips can be fixed to the edge of existing wooden or concrete steps to reduce the possibility of a fall.
6. Metal grating safety steps have a non-slip tread but snow removal may be difficult in heavy snowfall areas.

NOTE: Regardless of their quality, products or designs which are not properly installed will require continual maintenance and repair.

## 4.4 Patios and Decks

1. Concrete patio blocks that have different textures will reduce glare and minimize the possibility of slipping when the surface is wet. Coloured patio blocks often reduce glare.
2. All decks should have a continuous hand railing around the structure for added safety and security especially if they are near ground level, or have only a single step.
3. Wooden decks can be quite slippery when ice or water forms on the surface. A silica based paint (mixed with sand or glass) produces a roughened surface which is safer to walk on and can still be easily shovelled.

## 4.5 Seating Areas

1. Outdoor sitting areas that are well-lit and partially sheltered from excessive changes in temperature and wind, will increase the amount of time they can be used. For example, a seating area with a S.W. exposure will provide additional hours of sunlight and use.
2. Seating areas may be situated for viewing street activities, or in other areas of the yard, to accommodate a variety of activities and rest when required.
3. Benches and chairs should not be too low, and have back rests for comfort while sitting, plus, arm rests for leverage when getting up. Outdoor furniture made of plastic or wood is quick-drying and will not be too cold to sit on.

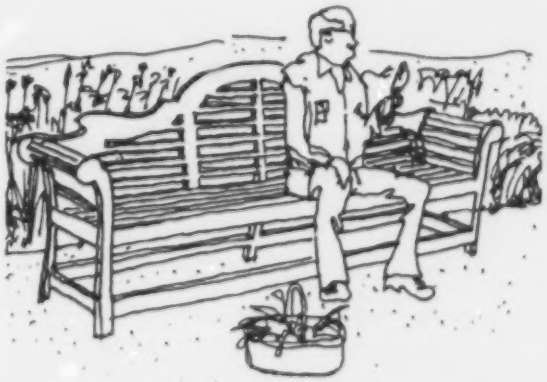

*Figure 22: Bench with Arms and a Back Rest*

## 4.6 Security Systems

Security systems reduce feelings of vulnerability that are often experienced by seniors who live alone.

1. Entry Doors: Good locks, secure doors, large peep holes and lever door handles (such as a "T" handle) will provide a greater protection and promote a sense of security.

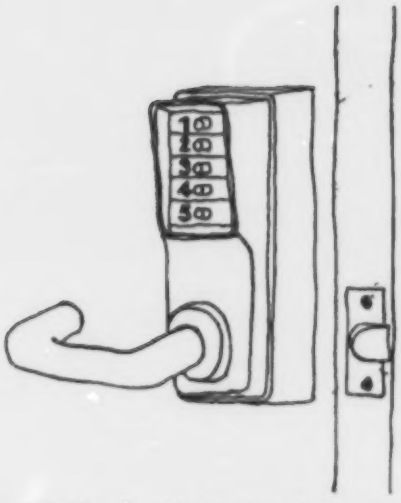

*Figure 23: "T" Handle with Punch Code Door Lock*

Prices vary considerably depending on the complexity of the security system. The following average prices for the various systems are approximate:

i) Double Dead Bolt - a key is required to open the entry door and to lock the door from the inside. $40 or $79 installed;

ii) Security Striker Plate - a steel plate fixed between the door and the door jam to eliminate forced entry. $40 or $65 installed;

iii) Large Peep Holes - 30 mm. (one in) in diameter with a 180 degree visual range. $30 or $55 installed;

iv) Punch Card Entry System - home owner enters a security code to open the door which eliminates the need to carry house keys. $300 or $350 installed;

v) Electronic Card Entry System - passing a plastic card through an electronic scanner opens the door. The cost is approximately $2,000 installed, that includes an alarm system that alerts neighbours to a forced entry;

vi) Security Storm Door - a lightweight double door that may include: a double dead bolt, levered door handles, a security striker plate, and a glass and screen door. Installed cost is between $700 and $1200, depending on the features chosen;

2. Steel Tubing Bars - Decorative bars installed on basement windows to prevent entry. Average cost is approximately $50 installed for 450 cm x 1.0 metre window (18 in x 3 ft.);

3. Automated meters (presently being installed in most cities) - will enable all utility companies (gas, water, sewer, and electric) to read meters through the phone system instead of having to visit each home. Seniors who do not wish tradespeople in their homes can contact their local utility company to explore the installation of an automated meter.

4. Real or symbolic barriers - help distinguish private property boundaries, and discourage strangers. These involve the strategic placement of landscape elements such as shrubs, hedges, fences and entrance posts. However, high solid fences are generally not recommended as they limit interaction and oversight by neighbours.

5. Home security can also be improved by: participating in the local neighbourhood watch program, and setting up agreements between neighbours to look after your property while you are away.

## 4.7 Security Lighting

Outdoor lighting is an important feature to consider for safety, greater visibility, and easier access around the home. If adequate garden lighting already exists, additional safety lighting may not be required. Lighting can be attractive, automated and tamper-proof in areas prone to vandalism, the following are security measures to improve outdoor lighting:

1. The strategic placement of lights in and around elements found in the landscape (ie: trees, shrubs entrance posts or along pathways), may deter intruders;

2. Uneven surfaces, entrances, steps, walk ways/ramps, garage or parking pads and low windows are all areas that a senior may want to illuminate for greater safety and security;
3. Lighting situated high to illuminate areas for recreation and security, or low enough to highlight planting beds, stairs or walk ways is an attractive and safe way to illuminate property;
4. Sensors that activate lights whenever someone steps onto the property, discourage intruders and provide illumination for the homeowner when entering the house. Average cost is approximately $150 installed.
5. Lighting may be a separate system or part of an overall home security package; in either case, it is important to avoid glare by building in recessed lights at paths and stairs or using non-glare fixtures at entry points.

   To illuminate the average size bungalow on a 15 x 36.5 m lot (50 x 120 ft.), with low pathway lighting and entry door illumination, complete with a photo-cell mechanism that turns the system on when it becomes dark, costs approximately $1500- $2,000 installed. This figure will depend on specific types of lighting desired and areas to be illuminated;
6. Garage door openers - generally incorporate an automatic internal garage light to illuminate the garage when the door rolls up. Also available is a "Vacation Switch" that enables the door power to be shut off while the homeowner is away.

# FIVE

# Adaptations for Special Needs

Modifying the landscape or building exterior may be necessary to accommodate specific physical disabilities. The first step is to evaluate personal needs and preferences, taking into consideration present and future physical inabilities, so that appropriate and affordable landscape modifications are chosen. The following is a check list for people with special needs who may be experiencing difficulty with the following:

| Problem | Solution |
|---|---|
| a. opening doors | punch code door opener, levered door handles |
| b. getting up after sitting | arms on outdoor benches, railings, higher seats |
| c. impaired balance | handrailings, extra seating |
| d. deteriorating eyesight | large house numbers, brightly coloured hand rails, extra exterior lighting, shelter from the sun. |
| e. glare from light | painted surfaces, shelter from the sun. |

## 5.1 Visually Impaired or Deteriorating Eyesight

Many people, particularly seniors, have difficulty distinguishing such colours as green and blue. Furthermore, the glare from shiny surfaces can cause serious problems in distinguishing objects or in identifying surface level changes such as, steps or the edges of a patio. This confusion can be minimized by:

1. painting handrails, door handles, mailboxes, gates, etcetera in bold contrasting colours such as red, yellow or orange;
2. installing hard surface materials in soft tinted non-glare colours for such areas as walkways, patios, decks and steps;
3. insuring that entrances are clearly marked, lighting is provided and outdoor areas are free from obstacles; and
4. using walkways with a hard, visually contrasting treatment (such as bricks or boards) at the edge of a sidewalk or pathway to lessen the chance of moving off the surface.

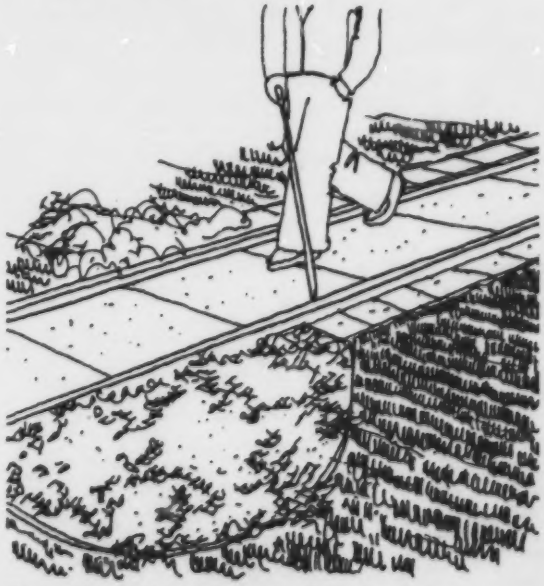

*Figure 24: Sidewalk Edge for Easier Access*

## 5.2 Semi-Ambulatory and Wheelchair Users

Those who suffer from strength and mobility impairments will benefit from:

1. walkways, ramps and stairs that have handrails on both sides and smooth non-slip surfaces;
2. ramps with a gradient of no more than a 1:12 slope, if the ramp is over 3 metres long, and a 1:10 slope, if the ramp is 3 metres or less. (A level rest area must be provided every 9 metres along its length and whenever there is a change in ramp direction);

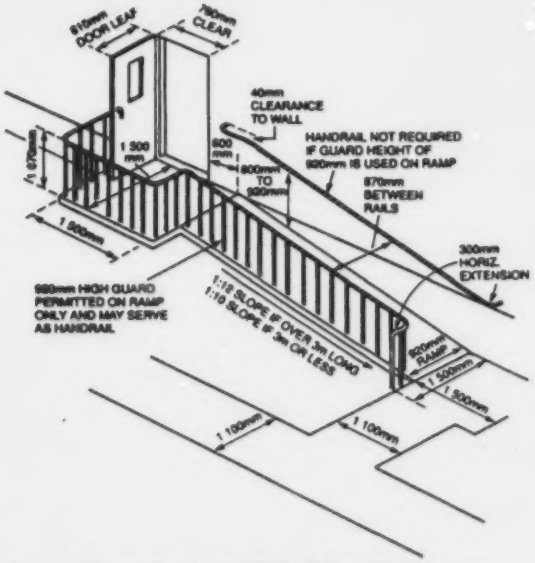
CLEARANCE TO WALL
HANDRAIL NOT REQUIRED IF GUARD HEIGHT OF 920mm IS USED ON RAMP
870mm BETWEEN RAILS
300mm HORIZ. EXTENSION
920mm HIGH GUARD PERMITTED ON RAMP ONLY AND MAY SERVE AS HANDRAIL
1:12 SLOPE IF OVER 3m LONG
1:10 SLOPE IF 3m OR LESS
1 500mm
1 100mm

*Figure 25: A Residential Wheelchair Ramp (Building Standards Branch, n.d., p.33)*

3. raised planting beds and hose bibs (spigots) which facilitate watering and gardening from a wheel chair; and

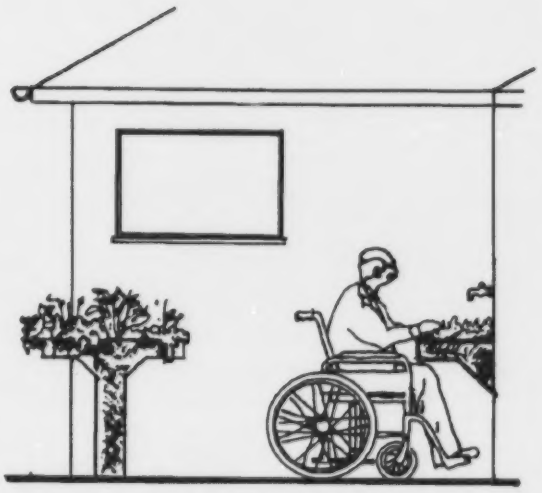

*Figure 26: Raised Planter for a Wheelchair*

4. accessible parking stalls at least 3.9 metres wide (12.5 ft.) which should be located as close as possible to an entry door or a hard surface pathway leading directly to the home.

## 5.3 A Typical Example of Adaptations for Easier Outdoor Living

This property has been revised to offer access and maintenance solutions that are possible in a residential setting. One must keep in mind that there is no "ideal" design but maintenance and access solutions based on individual needs, preferences and physical abilities.

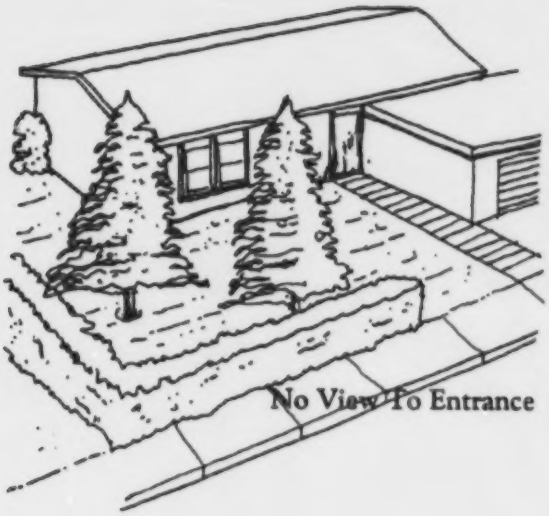


*Figure 27: Property Before Low Maintenance Adaptions*

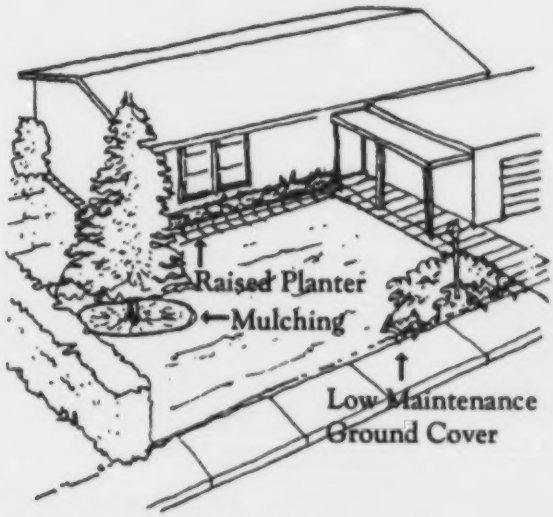


*Figure 28: Property After Low Maintenance Adaptions*

# SIX

# Construction

This chapter provides guidelines for seniors who may choose to modify their existing landscape or building exterior themselves; or, who are considering hiring a landscape or building contractor to do the work for them.

## 6.1 Do It Yourself

Generally most outdoor modifications of an existing situation (as outlined in Chapter Two) can be done by an individual or with assistance from friends and relatives. In either case, it is important that these modifications are pre-planned with drawings, if appropriate, to facilitate the smooth execution of the work.

However, some repairs or renovations are better left in the hands of landscape or building contractors to ensure that a job is done correctly. Hiring tradespeople to do work in or around the home can be time consuming and costly, but if adequate precautions are taken to ensure that an expert job is done, no further repairs will be required once the work is completed. The techniques covered in this chapter will help ensure that you receive a competent job at a reasonable and competitive price.

Points to consider:

1. Time vs Money - projects must be well planned as most tasks will take longer to do by yourself and should be compared with the money saved.
2. Knowledge - can you complete the job and have money available to contact a tradesperson if you require advice or assistance?
3. Physical Capability - if you have limited experience in outdoor modifications or construction, extra precautions should be taken to prevent injury.
4. Materials - do you have access to construction materials at economical rates? (many outlets charge extra for delivery, etc.)
5. Equipment - do you have the tools necessary to do the job or can you rent them at reasonable rates?

## 6.2 Hiring A Contractor

Many seniors are concerned about being taken advantage of if yard maintenance or building repairs are contracted out because they are unfamiliar with costs or details of the work.

Points to consider:

1. Letters of recommendation are a good way of selecting a company that is capable of doing the proposed work.
2. Companies that commit to their work and offer a letter of guarantee will give you some assurance that the job will be completed successfully.
3. Ensure that all work to be done by any company is clearly explained and well documented in written form before any work is started. Documentation should include the following items:

a. price

b. scope of work

c. schedule

d. guarantees/samples

e. your obligations

f. payment schedule

g. any arbitration process, and,

h. a list of who is responsible for obligations such as permits and insurance, and

i. holdback and partial payments.

4. Many people are reluctant to ask questions or get more than one estimate when contracting work. It is strongly suggested that no work be started or contract be signed until the senior has familiarized themselves with Appendix I, "Seniors Support Services", for available home renovation grants; and the tip sheet in Appendix V, that discusses "How to Hire a Contractor", published by Alberta Consumers and Corporate Affairs.

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation also publishes a brochure entitled, "How to Hire a Contractor", that provides estimating information and an example of a typical contract for home improvement work involving construction (see Appendix V for ordering details).

# SEVEN

## Conclusion

Previous research on senior citizen housing needs has generally dealt with alternative types of accommodation, but rarely makes mention of ways that a senior can remain in the home. Though many seniors want to stay in their homes and remain independent, they are only prepared to do so if the burden of home maintenance is lessened.

Exterior building and landscape maintenance concerns continue to be the primary reasons why seniors sell their family residences of many years, in favour of more supportive housing options such as retirement communities, senior citizen apartments or lodges.

This project identified those adaptations that seniors can make to their building exterior or landscaping to minimize maintenance procedures, and facilitate easier access to the outdoors.

This report provides senior citizens with information about easier outdoor maintenance methods, and enables them to make informed decisions about contracting services.

While the study focused on the long term independent residency of seniors in their own homes, the information compiled will be of some benefit to others who have not reached retirement age but who are considering a change in lifestyle.

These "pre-seniors" may decide to take preventive measures and make modifications to their existing home now, instead of anticipating a future move to an alternative seniors' housing complex. They will generally find landscape adaptations easiest to do at this time, since they still have an income and the physical capabilities to handle landscaping or exterior building modifications themselves.

Preventative maintenance measures and landscape adaptations as outlined in this report will save time and money over the long term. However, before any modifications take place, seniors are advised to assess their needs and long term physical and financial capabilities, so that they may choose the appropriate renovations or adaptations necessary to facilitate their continued independent living.

*Figure 29: Seniors Enjoying Their Yard*

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# Appendices

## APPENDIX I
## Seniors Support Services

1.1 Kerby Centre - Calgary

1.2 Seniors Assisting Seniors - (S.A.S.) - Calgary

1.3 Association for Residence Maintenance for Seniors - (A.R.M.S.) - Edmonton

1.4 The Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired - Edmonton

2.1 City of Calgary: Home Support Services

3.1 The Co-ordinated Home Care Program - (C.H.C.P.) - Alberta

3.2 The Home Adaptation Program (H.A.P.) - Alberta

3.3 The Senior's Independent Living Program - Alberta

4.0 The Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program - (R.R.A.P.) - Canada

# APPENDIX I

## Seniors Support Services

A number of services and grants are available that assist seniors to make repairs and modifications to their homes so that they are able to remain independent as long as possible. Many programs offering social and financial support can be found at the municipal, provincial and federal levels of government. As well, a number of seniors have organized their own programs directed specifically towards home help maintenance schemes.

This list provides the reader with an overview of some of the pertinent programs and services. They include:

1. Seniors Information Services
2. Municipal Support Services
3. Provincial Assistance Programs
4. Federal Programs

### 1.1 Kerby Centre - Calgary

Seniors operate the Centre for seniors - they know their needs. It is a place to meet people, to try new things and to seek help when needed.

The centre provides information and counselling to people 60 years of age and over regarding pensions, finances, taxes, home help, etc. Programs range from assisting seniors in finding accommodation to health surveillance, food services, social or recreational activities, and professional supportive counselling for frail seniors and their caregivers.

For further information contact:

Kerby Information/Advocacy Department
1133 - 7 Avenue S.W.
Calgary, Alberta
T2P 1B2

**Telephone: 265-0661**

### 1.2 Seniors Assisting Seniors - (S.A.S.) - Calgary

A self-help program run for and by senior citizens whereby skills and services are exchanged. A senior's request for service is matched with skilled persons available to do the job. The senior doing the job is credited with the number of hours expended and is encouraged to call on S.A.S. for services. A person also has the option to pay for services, or in the case of a person who is unable to pay, S.A.S. help is still available.

Skills that can be exchanged for services range from: small household repairs, painting (small jobs), small carpentry jobs, gardening, watering during holidays, to reading, baking, and advice about car maintenance.

The goal of the program is to provide an exchange service which will enable seniors to help each other maintain their home economically, thus making it possible for them to remain independent as long as possible. The program also provides an opportunity for seniors to service others thereby maintaining their own independence, interest and sense of self-worth.

For more information contact:

Seniors Assisting Seniors
2212 - 13 Street N.W.
Calgary, Alberta
T2M 4P7

**Telephone: (403) 289 - 4780**

### 1.3 Association For Residence Maintenance For Seniors - (A.R.M.S.) - Edmonton

A registered non-profit association that provides service to seniors over sixty (60) years of age living in their own homes, self-contained apartments or in senior citizen centres.

Their main objective is to provide residence maintenance and home care services, primarily for the handicapped and elderly within the Greater Edmonton Area.

Services are available on an hourly rate basis and range from minor repairs to major housecleaning. Outside maintenance is also provided and includes such tasks as lawn cutting, hedge trimming, gardening, cleaning eavestroughs and snow shovelling.

This association offers an advisory service for seniors who have major maintenance and renovation problems in their homes, together with a referral list of reliable contractors. Advisers will carry out a safety inspection of the home, define the work to be done in terms understandable to the senior, advise on the selection of a contractor, advise on appropriate progress payments and inspect the work in progress.

For more information contact:

A.R.M.S.
#162, 14315 - 118 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T5L 4S6
Contact: Fran Fisher, Executive Director

**Telephone: (403) 451-4475**

### 1.4 The Society For the Retired and Semi-Retired - Edmonton

The Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired, is a multi-purpose agency serving the needs of senior citizens. One service, the Retirement Registry helps older people to find rewarding things to do with their time, talents and experience on a volunteer or paid basis.

Services provided by Retirement Registry workers include home support services such as snow removal, yardwork, small home repairs, small construction jobs, (building a back step), volunteer drivers, or personal care and housekeeping. The scale and range of jobs the Registry is able to undertake is dependent on the skills of the volunteers. Some young people and businesses are also registered to help with jobs like snow removal.

Older volunteers are also referred to positions both within the Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired and in other community organizations. Employment requests are also accepted from businesses who are looking for older workers.

Retirement Registry
The Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired
15 Sir Winston Churchill Square
Edmonton, Alberta
T5J 2E5
**Telephone: (403) 423-5532**

### 2.1 City of Calgary: Home Support Services - Calgary

This program provides three separate services - Project Home Help - Work Activity Project and a Shopping Service, to help seniors and disabled persons maintain their homes. While there is no charge for the labour components related to the first two services, recipients are responsible for all materials.

Project Home Help assistance is provided through the provision of home and yard maintenance services. It is designed to assist low income, infirm senior citizens and disabled persons of limited financial means in order that they may remain in their homes.

A secondary objective is to teach positive work habits and job skills to project workers and thereby improve their ability to secure and maintain employment.

Services available include a variety of home maintenance tasks: yard work (lawns, gardens, hedges, tree pruning) minor house repairs (carpentry and painting) housecleaning and snow removal. **Telephone: 243-2757**

The Work Activity Project provides job training, work experience, and academic upgrading for persons who have had difficulty in maintaining employment. A secondary objective is to provide repairs and renovations to households of low income or infirm senior citizens and disabled persons of limited financial means, so they are able to remain in their homes.

Services available range from major interior and exterior painting to household repairs such as fence reconstruction, porch, step handrail replacement and minor roofing repair. **Telephone: 243-1501**

Shopping Service is also available for the frail and elderly at a minimal cost.
**Telephone: 243-0850**

### 3.1 The Coordinated Home Care Program - (C.H.C.P.) - Alberta

This program offers a range of health care and support services to eligible individuals living in the community. It is designed to:

1. improve, maintain or delay deterioration of the health status and level of independence of persons who cannot manage independently at home;
2. support families in caring for an ill or elderly family member in the home; and
3. prevent, delay, or reduce the need for institutionalization.

According to the Coordinated Home Care Program Regulations, a person may be admitted to the program with authorization from a physician that the person possesses a medical condition which limits that person's ability to function independently. Furthermore, the manager of the Home Care Program must be satisfied that:

- the person requires a health care service or support services;
- the person's home is suitable for the provision of a health care service or a support services;
- the program is the most suitable method of providing the amount, level and type of health care or support service required by the person; and
- the cost of providing any health care or support service to the person will not exceed the cost of providing a similar level of care in a health care facility.

A person must also be registered under the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan and must require a health care service. Some persons, however, are eligible for Home Care despite the fact that they require only support services. In the case of a person who is eligible for support services only, there are four identifiable groups:

- those who are 65 years of age or older;
- those who are 18 years of age or older, physically handicapped and residing in a facility designated by the Regulation;

**Palliative Care Clients;**

Spouses or dependents of a person 65 years of age or older, and of a person receiving a widow's pension if these persons are registered under the same certificate of registration issued under the Health Insurance Premiums Act, and if they meet the other eligibility requirements.

Health services provided by the program may include:

- nursing;
- occupational therapy;
- physiotherapy;
- speech therapy;
- respiratory therapy; and
- nutrition services.

Support services may include:

- homemaker or homehelp services;
- personal care services;
- heavy housework services;
- handyman services; and
- transportation services.

Information about homecare and related support services is available through local Health Units. A list of the home care managers for each health unit in Alberta is contained in the Appendix.

For further information contact:

Alberta Home Care Unit
7th Street Plaza, 8th Floor
10030 - 107th Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T5J 3E4

**Telephone: 427 - 4610**

### 3.2 The Home Adaptation Program - (H.A.P.) - Alberta

This program is designed to promote the modification of existing housing and the construction of new housing for wheelchair users. It is not a general housing repair program.

To be eligible under the program, one must meet a number of specific criteria:

a) Individual
   - either a homeowner or tenant
   - must be a wheel chair user, or
   - be an individual whose mobility disability will eventually require a wheelchair, or
   - have such a person in the home.

b) Residency
   - must live in Alberta at least nine (9) months of the year, and
   - have lived in Canada for at least three years and in Alberta at least for one year.

c) Citizenry
   - must be a Canadian citizen or a landed immigrant.

d) Income
   - must receive "Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped", or
   - must receive "Alberta Assured Income Plan" benefits, or
   - have a household income of $30,000 or less for the previous year.

Assistance is provided through a $5,000 grant to modify a housing unit for a wheelchair user or for a person whose mobility disability will eventually require the use of a wheelchair.

The grant money will be used towards permanent modifications which are listed as approved by the program to improve wheelchair accessibility and movement in the home.

Brochures and application forms for the Home Adaptation Program can be obtained from the following office:

Contact:

The Home Adaptation Program
Housing Division, Alberta Municipal Affairs
P.O. Box 3120
Edmonton, Alberta
T5J 4L8

**Telephone: (403) 427 - 8161**

### 3.3 The Seniors' Independent Living Program - Alberta

The Seniors' Independent Living Program commenced on January 1, 1990 and replaces the Seniors' Home Improvement Program Extension which terminated on December 31, 1989.

Applications can be made between January 1, 1990 and December 31, 1993.

This program assists low to moderate income senior citizen homeowners to repair or improve their homes. Grants of up to $4,000 are available (depending upon income and previous benefits received under the Seniors' Home Improvement Program or its Extension).

There are three ways to use the grant money:

1. for permanent repairs and improvements to the home;
2. five per cent (5%) of the grant funds may be used towards minor home repairs and maintenance; and
3. up to $700 of the grant funds may be used towards the purchase of an approved medical alert unit from an approved medical alert agency.

Once the application has been approved, applicants have four years, from the date of approval, in which to use the grant money.

**Who can apply for this program?**
To be eligible for a grant under this program you must be a homeowner and:

- 65 years of age or older, or a widow or widower aged 55 or older;
- a Canadian citizen or landed immigrant;
- have lived in Canada for at least three years and in Alberta for one or more years prior to application;
- live in your home in Alberta at least nine months of each year; and
- have a household income of $25,000 or less for the previous calendar year.

**Eligible Repairs or Improvements**
Eligible applicants may receive reimbursement for the cost of the following repairs and improvements:

- alterations or repairs to the interior or exterior of the home or garage;
- purchase, installation, repair or improvements of safety and security devices, including fire and burglar alarms;
- construction, repair or improvement of a fence, driveway, sidewalk, ramp, porch or patio; and,
- repair, alteration or rebuilding of a home or garage damaged or destroyed by disaster, excluding costs covered by insurance or disaster funds, etc.

**Minor Repairs and Maintenance**
Five per cent (5%) of the approved grant may be used towards minor home repairs and maintenance costs. Some examples of items that qualify as small repairs or maintenance are as follows:

- cleaning (home and garage); windows, walls, carpets, draperies, eavestroughs;
- snow removal - sidewalk, driveway and roof; and
- yard maintenance - tree pruning, grass cutting, and gardening services.

Note: There are many more eligible repairs and improvements than listed above.
For further information, please contact:

Seniors' Independent Living Program
Home Improvement Office
Housing Division, Alberta Municipal Affairs
Main Floor, Devonian Building
11156 Jasper Avenue
P.O. Box 2453
Edmonton, Alberta
T5J 3B8

In Edmonton telephone (403) 427-5760.
Other areas in Alberta telephone the Long Distance Operator and ask for Zenith 22093

**4.0 The Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program - (R.R.A.P.) - Canada**

The Disabled RRAP program allows disabled persons to remain independent in their own homes or in rental accommodation by providing financial support in the form of loans for residential adaptations to make homes more accessible. This federal program administered by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation has the following conditions of assistance and eligibility.

The program provides loans of up to $5,000 per applicant who is either disabled or has a disabled spouse or other dependent family member. Further, as much as $5,000 is forgivable under the program, subject to a sliding income scale. Maximum forgiveness of a loan is available for a person with an income of less than $23,000. Forgiveness declines to zero at a household income of $33,000.

Homeowner RRAP provides financial assistance to low-income homeowners for major home repairs. Assistance is provided in the form of a loan which, depending on the household income, may be partially forgivable. The amount of assistance depends on the actual costs of repairs and whether the applicant lives in a rural or urban area.

Further details and applications for the RRAP program may be obtained from:

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
Box 1273
Suite 200, Plaza 124
10216 - 124th Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T5J 2M8

**Telephone: (403) 482 - 8700**

or ...
Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
Box 2560
Suite 500, 508 - 11th Avenue S.W.
Calgary, Alberta
T2P 2N9

**Telephone: (403) 292 - 6200**

A more complete listing of the broad range of programs and support available to seniors in Alberta can be found in the publication "Programs For Seniors". This document is published by the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta who may be contacted at :

2nd floor, 10109 - 106 Street
Energy Square Building
Edmonton, Alberta
T5J 3L7

**Telephone: (403) 422-2321**

Outside of the Edmonton area, the office can be called free of charge by contacting:

Alberta Seniors' Information Line
**1-800-642-3853**

# APPENDIX II
## Landscape Maintenance Guidelines

Spring Clean-up and Outdoor Preparations

Lawns

Deciduous/Coniferous Trees and Shrubs

Annuals and Perennials

Fall/Winter Outdoor Preparations

Herbicides and Pesticides

# APPENDIX II

## Landscape Maintenance Guidelines

Many people water their lawn or cut their grass more often than is necessary. An adequate maintenance program does not have to be a rigorous schedule of tasks to keep a yard in a good appearance. The following guidelines and suggestions will help you to maintain your landscaping.

## Spring Clean-Up and Outdoor Preparations

1. Rake, broom or spray away salt and gravel build-up along boulevards where road salting has occurred.
2. Sharpen garden tools for top efficiency. A dull shovel can make work harder.
3. Rake leaves, dead branches, garbage and general debris from the entire site.
4. Reset lockstone or pavers to proper levels if settling has occurred.
5. Start-up irrigation system and check all lines, head and nozzles, making replacements as required. Repair leaks in lines to maintain operating pressure.
6. Hose down coniferous trees and shrubs to wash off winter grime.
7. Cultivate shrub beds and tree wells.
8. Review pruning needs.

## Lawns

### Watering Program

1. Watering should be done during the evening for the best results and never in the afternoon since most water will just evaporate.
2. During the summer months, lawns should have a minimum precipitation cover of 25 - 40 mm (1-1.5 in) per week and a minimum moisture penetration of 100-300 mm (4 to 5 in). To encourage deep root growth, watering should take between 1 and 2 hours, depending upon the type of sprinkler used and water pressure available.

To determine the time required to accumulate 25mm of water (an inch), set a measuring cup or container under the spray.

3. As fall approaches water less frequently to harden off the lawn.

### Mowing

1. Mow at regular intervals to keep grass length at 40 mm - 60 mm (1.5 to 2 inches).
2. Keep mower blades sharp and remove grass clippings after each mowing to minimize lawn disease.

### Lawn Fertilizing

1. Apply a balanced fertilizer (such as 14-14-7 ; nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium), three times per year (April, June and August) or apply a fertilizer that will eliminate any soil deficiencies discovered by a periodic soil analysis.
2. Fertilizer should generally be applied evenly to grass when the area is dry and humidity is low, and water immediately after application (refer to specific instructions on container).

Note: Areas where soil or grass has become compacted (ie: under tree canopies) should be aerated every year to allow oxygen and water to enter the subsoil.

## Deciduous/Coniferous Trees and Shrubs

**Watering**

1. Slowly water trees once per week to ensure moisture penetration of the root system.
2. Apply 40 litres per 25 mm of tree trunk thickness (caliper) at each watering (10 gallons per 1 inch of trunk thickness).
3. Depending on the height or spread of a shrub (whichever is greater) apply 35 to 40 litres of water per metre (3 to 4 gallons per foot) at each watering.
4. In the fall, water trees and shrubs less frequently to harden them off. If the soil is still moist when the leaves start to drop, watering can be stopped.

**Pruning**

1. Coniferous trees and shrubs should not be pruned unless limbs have been broken.
2. Deciduous trees and shrubs should be pruned as follows:

   a) remove broken branches;

   b) thin out the canopy by removing dead, dying or weaker branches;

   c) treat all cuts and scrapes over 25 mm (1 in) with a horticulturally accepted non-toxic, non-hardening emulsion.

**Cultivation of Trees, Shrubs and Plant Beds**

1. Once a month, during the growing season, cultivate (loosen soil), and weed tree wells, and planted beds

**Fertilizing Guidelines**

1. Use a low-analysis phosphorus fertilizer (5-10-5 or 6-10-4), and apply as per manufacturer's directions.
2. Apply 0.45 kg of fertilizer for each 25 mm caliper (1 in) of tree.

Note: Get soil samples analyzed every 3 years to determine the specific fertilizer needs for all plant material.

## Annuals and Perennials

**Watering**

1. Water newly planted annuals and perennials with a mild fertilizer solution, such as 10% nitrogen, 52% phosphorus and 10% potassium. Thereafter, water whenever the soil begins to dry out.
2. Water early in the day or during the evening hours.
3. Use a soaking rather than sprinkling technique.
4. Avoid applying water to the surface of leaves and flowers.

## Fall/Winter Outdoor Preparations

1. Drain or blow out all irrigation lines and valves during September or before freeze-up.
2. Cultivate shrub beds, removing dead and dying annuals.
3. Mulch perennial beds and plant bulbs.

## Herbicides and Pesticides

1. Use in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations
2. When in doubt about what, when or how much chemical to use, contact a licensed pesticide applicator.
3. A licensed pesticide/herbicide applicator should be called in every couple of years to assess the extent of any infestation of plant materials and to provide an estimate to correct any related problems.

# APPENDIX III

## Cost of Landscape Materials

# APPENDIX III

## Cost of Landscape Materials

In order to give the reader an idea of the cost of adaptations and/or modifications, a list of construction materials has been compiled for estimating purposes. Prices noted are for 1990 and will vary from region to region depending on availability of material and labour costs.

| Description | Unit Average | Installed Price - 1990 |
|---|---|---|
| Brick Pavers | square metre | 55.00 |
| Sidewalk Blocks | square metre | 50.00 |
| Poured Concrete | cubic metre | 100.00 |
| Lawn Edging | 6.5 metres | 15.00 |
| Filter Fabric | 1 linear metre | 5.00 |
| Washed Gravel | (30 mm) square metre | 17.00 |
| Red shale | (30 mm) square metre | 10.00 |
| Wood Bark | (30 mm) cubic metre | 120.00 |
| Sodding: Supply and Install | square metre | 3.00 |
| Topsoil: Supply and Install | square metre | 10.00 |
| Shrub Bed Excavation | cubic metre | 4.00 |
| Raised Wooden Planter | .900 x .900 x 2.4 metres (3 x 3 x 8 ft) - pressure treated | 500.00 |
| Irrigation System<br>- Installed and automatic<br>- One year maintenance guarantee | 15 x 36.5 metres<br>(50 x 120 ft) | $1,500.00 - $2,000.00 |

# APPENDIX IV

## Low Maintenance Plant Material

**Ground Covers**
**Perennials**

Plants for a Rock Garden

Plants for Cut Flowers

**Deciduous Shrubs**

With Colourful Foliage or Flowers

With Colourful Fall Foliage

With Colourful Bark

For Difficult City Conditions

To Attract Birds

**Roses**
**Vines**
**Coniferous Shrubs**

Spreading Junipers

Upright Junipers

**Deciduous Trees**

Fruiting Trees

Flowering Ornamentals Trees

**Coniferous Trees**

# APPENDIX IV

## Low Maintenance Plant Material

### Ground Covers

Ajuga reptans - Carpet Bugleflower

Anthemis tinctoria - Golden Marquerite

Artemisia schmidtiana - Silver Mound

Bergenia cordifolia - Giant Rockfoil

Cerastium tomontosum - Snow In Summer

Clematis tangutica - Golden Clematis

Hosta var. - Plantain Lily

Iberis sempervirens - White Candytuft

Juniperus - Juniper (low spreading)

Lamium maculatum - Pink Flowered Lamium

Parthenocissus quinquefolia - Virginia Creeper

Paxistima canbyi - Cliff Green

Phalaris sp. - Ribbon Grass

Polygonatum multiflorum - Solomon's Seal

Sedum - Sedum (many varieties)

Sempervivum tectorum - Hen and Chickens

Thymus - Thyme (many varieties)

### Perennials

Althaea rosea - Hollyhock

Anemone patens - Wild Crocus

Campanula medium - Cup and Saucer

Dianthus barbatus - Sweet William

Dicentra x "Luxuriant" - Everblooming Fernleaf Bleeding heart

Dodecatheon meadia - Shooting Star

Euphorbia epithymoides - Spurge

Festuca ovina glauca - Tufted Blue Grass

Geranium pratense "Magnificum" - Blue Cranesbill

Iris germanica - Bearded Iris

Lamium maculatum - "Beacon Silver" Lamium

Lysimachia punctata - Yellow Loosestrife

Lythrum sp. - Purple Loosestrife

Matteucia struthiopteris - Ostrich Fern

Polemonium caeruleum - Jacob's Ladder

Potentilla sp. - Potentilla

Pulmonaria angustifolia - Lungwort

Saxifraga sp. - Saxifragae

Thalictrum dipterocarpum - Meadow Rue

Tradescantia virginica - Spider-Wort

Trollius europaeus - Globe Flower

Yucca glauca - Yucca

**Plants for a Rock Garden**

Aquilegia alpina - Apline Columbine

Aubretia sp. - Rock Cress

Auricula Primrose - Primula auricula hybrids

Dianthus Gratianopolitanus - Cheddar Pinks Carnation

Dianthus x "Spotti" - Spotted Carnation

Leontopodium alpinum - Edelweiss

Papaver alpinum - Poppy

Potentilla aurea - Potentilla

Sedum - Sedum (many varieties)

Veronica - Speedwell (many varieties)

**Plants for Cut Flowers**

Achillea filipendulina - Yarrow

Aster nova-angliae - Fall Aster

Astilbe - False Spirea

Campanula persicifolia - Peach-leaved Bellflower

Centaurea montana - Bachelor's Button
Delphiniium - (many varieties)
Erigeron hybrid - Pink Jewel Fleabane
Gaillardia x grandiflora - Blanket Flower
Geum x borisii - Orange Avens
Gypsophilia paniculata - White Baby's Breath
Helenium autumnale - Moerheim Beauty
Heuchera sanguinea - Red Coral-Bells
Lillium tigrinum - Tiger Lily
Lychnis chalcedonica - Maltese Cross
Lychnis x haageana - (orange) Campion
Lupinus hybrids - Lupine
Myosotis sylvatica - Forget Me Not
Paeonia officialis - Peony
Ratibida columnifera - Prairie Coneflower
Scabiosa caucasica - Pincushion Flower
Sedum - Sedum (many varieties)
Verbascum olympicum - King's Candlestick
Viola odorata - Sweet Violet

## Deciduous Shrubs

**Shrubs with Colourful Foliage or Flowers**

Amelanchier sp. - Saskatoon
Eleagnus angustifolia - Russian Olive
Turkestan Burning Bush
Lonicera brownii - Trumpet honeysuckle
Philadelphus lewissi "Waterton" - Waterton Mock Orange
Prunus cistena - Purple Leaf Plum
Rosa rubrifolia - Red Leaf Rose
Syringa amurensis japonica - Japanese Lilac Tree
Syringa meyeri - Dwarf Korean Lilac

**Shrubs with Colourful Fall Foliage**

Acer ginnala - Amur maple
Cotoneaster acutifolia - Cotoneaster
Euonymus alata - Burning Bush
Viburnum lantana - Wayfaring tree

**Shrubs with Colourful Bark**

Physocarpus opulifolius luteus - Golden Ninebark
Siberian Dogwood - Cornus alba siberica

Shrubs for Difficult City Conditions

Acer ginnala - Amur maple
Caragana "Lorbergii" - Fernleaf Caragan
Cotoneaster acutifolia - Peking Cotoneaster
Hippohae rhamnoides - Sea Buckthorn
Potentilla - Potentilla sp.
Ribes alpinum - Alpine currant
Sherpherdia argentia - Buffaloberry
Spirea vanhouttei - Bridal Wreath
Spirea x arguta - Garland

**Shrubs that Attract Birds**

Nanking Cherry - Prunus tomentosa
Ribes "Pixwell" - Gooseberry
Sambucus racemosa - Red Berried Elder
Symphoricarpos albus - Snowberry
Viburnum trilobum - Highbush Cranberry

## Roses

Adelaide Hoodless, Austrian Copper, Blanc de Coubert, Cuthbert Grant, F.J. Grootendorst, Hansa, Harrison Yellow, Jens Munk, Morden Cardinette, Pink Grootendorst, Therese Bugnet.

## Vines

Clematis "Jackmanii" (purple flower), Clematis tangutica (yellow flower)
Parthenocissus quinquefolia - Virginia Creeper

Lathyrus latifolius - Sweet Pea

Lonicera sempervirens -

Climbing Honeysuckle

## Coniferous Shrubs

**Spreading Junipers**

Arcadia, Bar Harbour, Blue Chip, Blue Danube, Broadmoor, Buffalo, Calgary Carpet, Hughes, Prince of Wales, Savin, Sea Green, Scandia, Wiltoni, and Yukon Belle.

**Upright Junipers**

Cologreen, Cupressifolia Erecta, Moonglow and Tolleson's Weeping.

## Deciduous Trees

Hawthorn - Crataegus x mordenensis "Snowbird"

Mayday - Prunus padus commutata

Russian Mountain Ash - Sorbus rossica

Green Ash - Fraxinus pennsylvanica

Siberian Elm - Ulmus pumila

Little Leaf Linden - Tilia cordata

**Fruiting Trees**

Apple - Norland, Patterson, Goodland and Westland, Harcourt, Parkland
Crab apple - Rosybrook, and Dolgo

**Flowering Ornamental Trees**

Apples - Almey, Kelsey, Makamik, McDonald, Pyramimd, Radiant, Royalty, Rudolph, and Strathmore.

Plums - Brookgold, Brookred, Pembina, and Ptitsen.

Amur Cherry - Prunus maackii

Shubert Cherry - Prunus virginiana

## Coniferous Trees

Pine - Bristlecone, Scotch Pine, Mugho Pine, Swiss Mountain Pine.

Spruce - Colorado Spruce, White Spruce, Nest Spruce.

Larch - Larix siberica

NOTE: It is essential before purchasing any type of plant that the right type of growing conditions exist for successful establishment of the plant. In areas that experience Chinook weather (warm, dry winds) plants must have a high tolerance to severe changes in climate and temperature. Local nurseries may give a guarantee on plant material. The normal guarantees for trees, shrubs, and annual flowers are: one year, one year, and a season respectively; however, this should be confirmed before plants are purchased.

Supplementing your gardening library with information written locally on plant material grown in your region will be beneficial since this is not an extensive list of low maintenance plant material that could potentially be grown in your area.

# APPENDIX V

**Home Improvements: How to Hire a Contractor**

The following insert is entitled "Consumer Tips: Home Improvements: How to Hire a Contractor, from Alberta Consumer and Corporate Affairs.

NOTE: Another useful publication entitled "How to hire a contractor", is available from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. This brochure provides information on estimating and gives an example of a typical contract for home improvements when work involves construction (see Bibliography for full reference).

CONSUMER tips

# Home Improvements: How to Hire a Contractor

February 1990

Hiring someone to make improvements or repairs to your home can be a satisfying experience as you watch the changes take shape.

Unfortunately, home improvements can also be frustrating and needlessly expensive. Homeowners frequently complain of poor workmanship, delays, and misunderstandings about how the work was to be done.

Careful planning can help to avoid these problems, and greatly contribute to the success of your project. This tipsheet will help you to:

- Hire the right contractor
- Protect yourself with a detailed written contract
- Ensure that legal requirements are followed
- Avoid scams
- Protect yourself from liens

## Know what you want done

Try to make your mistakes on paper. In other words, take as much time as you can to plan your home improvement project. Experts say planning should take one-third of the entire time spent on the project!

Consult library books, self-help books and magazines. You might even consider enrolling in an evening course on home renovations. Here are some other suggestions:

- If you are planning a large project, such as a kitchen or bathroom renovation, it's a good idea to start a "renovation" binder. Clip articles and pictures of ideas you like. Make notes and discuss the project with your family or friends.
- Try to do as much legwork as possible yourself. If you'll need new light fixtures, for example, visit lighting stores and talk to sales staff. If you don't plan ahead, you may end up making bad decisions you'll have to live with for years.

## Should you do the work yourself?

The do-it-yourself approach can be extremely rewarding — or extremely frustrating.

The advantages? You may save money, get better results, and reap personal satisfaction.

The disadvantages? You may greatly underestimate the amount of skill and time required. You may also find that you won't save as much money as you expected. Contractors can buy materials at lower prices than most homeowners. If they pass those reductions on to you, your savings can be considerable.

A smart compromise may be to hire someone for the skilled jobs, and to perform the less-complicated jobs yourself (such as minor demolition, painting or clean-up).

Conclusion: Be sure you have the needed skills, time, and interest before you choose the do-it-yourself approach.

## Who does what?

You can avoid potential problems by being clear about who is responsible for what.

### ▼ The homeowner

- Decides what is to be done
- Selects the contractor



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Alberta Consumer and Corporate Affairs encourages fairness in the marketplace between buyers and sellers.

- Provides the drawings and specifications
- Makes sure the contract describes the job completely and correctly
- Gets zoning approval, if needed
- Ensures that permits are obtained and inspections are done, although the contractor usually makes the arrangements
- Gets necessary permits, or has the contractor get them
- Before excavation, phones the Alberta First Call Location Service (1-800-242-3447) to find out where cable or pipelines are buried. Call at least two working days before excavation is scheduled. Call cable television companies separately.
- Tells the contractor immediately when the work does not appear to be satisfactory
- Makes the final decision on whether or not the job has been done satisfactorily

### ▼ The general contractor

- Supervises and pays workers, suppliers, and individual tradespeople, and ensures that work is of good quality
- Usually gets required permits and arranges for necessary inspections (although the homeowner is ultimately responsible for this)
- Carries out all the work described in the contract (unless he has written authorization for changes)
- Maintains public liability and property insurance, plus workers' compensation coverage

### ▼ The foreman

- Heads the work crew. (Direct general questions or comments to him, rather than to individual workers.)

### ▼ The subcontractor

- Does special work, such as plumbing and wiring, for the general contractor who hires him

### ▼ The inspectors

- Conduct inspections to ensure that various aspects of the project meet building codes

## Do I need a general contractor?

If you need many types of contractors to do your home improvements, you can do one of two things. You can hire the various contractors as you need them, or you can hire a general contractor who arranges for all the other workers.

A general contractor can save you time and money by scheduling work so it flows smoothly — a complicated task!

## How to find a contractor

The best way to find a contractor is through satisfied customers. Ask around. Have any of your friends or neighbors completed a similar project? Were they happy with the work and the price? Check the work. Does it meet your standards?

Some of the following sources may also help you find a contractor:

- Some of the larger building supply and hardware stores do home improvement contract work.
- Your local home builders' association (which is affiliated with the Canadian Home Builders' Association) may suggest someone.
- The Yellow Pages of your telephone directory may help. Look under "General Contracting, Building Contractors" or the particular specialty you need, such as roofing or insulation. **This is the least desirable way to select a contractor, as it carries no recommendation or approval whatsoever.**

### ▼ Describe the project

When you're ready, describe the project in writing as completely as you can. Use pictures and drawings if possible. Write down the type and quality of materials you want.

Give the same details to all prospective contractors. That way, they'll know what the job requires and be bidding on the same work.

### ▼ Get more than one estimate

Ask for written estimates from more than one business. An estimate should contain a description of the work to be done, the materials to be used and

their quality, the beginning and completion dates, the total price, guarantees, and method of payment.

### ▼ Check licences and bonds

In some cases a contractor must be licensed and bonded. Refer to the information in the box, *Prepaid Contractors*.

### ▼ Check references

Ask the contractor for the names of his customers in your area. Try to look over those completed home improvement projects. Most people will be glad to help you. But make sure they're not relatives or business associates of the contractor.

### ▼ Check qualifications

Ask if the tradespeople doing the work have the qualifications for the job. Ask to see the pocket certificates issued by Alberta Career Development and Employment.

Phone the Better Business Bureau. They keep a record of complaints received against member contractors working in the area.

## Homeowner beware

Avoid contractors:

- Who knock on the door to tell you they just happen to be doing some work in the area and can give you a "special price"
- Who promise a discount if you allow them to use your home "to advertise our work." Probably the same offer will have been made to everyone
- Who quote a price without seeing the job
- Who demand a large down payment "to buy materials." Most reputable contractors can maintain charge accounts with their suppliers
- Who refuse to give you a written contract outlining what they will do
- Whose only address is a post office box, a telephone answering number, or the address of their answering service

### Prepaid Contractors

**Special contract requirements:** If a contract is worth $200 or more, and if a contractor accepts money before the job is completed, he is required by Alberta law to give you a written contract. It must contain:

- The place and date of the contract
- The name and address of the contractor and the homeowner
- A description of the services and work to be done
- The total price and conditions of payment, including the amount of the down payments and when payments are to be made
- The completion date

The contractor must give you a copy of the written contract at whichever time comes first:

- On or before the date the work begins
- Within 10 days after you sign the contract

**Licensing and bonding requirements:** Special regulations apply to contractors in Alberta if:

- They accept money before work is complete, and
- They look for work and discuss a contract away from their normal place of business — for example, in your home

Contractors who carry out *both* practices must be licensed by Alberta Consumer and Corporate Affairs. They must also be bonded by a bonding company. You can find out if a contractor is licensed and bonded by checking the nearest office of Alberta Consumer and Corporate Affairs.

## Get a good written contract

Although a contract can be concluded with a simple handshake or verbal agreement, a written contract is always a good idea. Verbal contracts can be difficult to prove. And in some cases the law says that the contract *must* be in writing. (Refer to the box, *Prepaid Contractors.*)

There is really no such thing as a standard written contract. Each contract is an individual document covering a special situation. Review the *Contract Checklist* to see what should be in a contract. If a job is small, you won't need as detailed a contract.

Once you sign a contract, it becomes legally binding, so read it carefully. Are you satisfied with the description of the work to be done? This is an area where most misunderstandings and problems can arise. Agreeing on clear, exact job specifications is extremely important. Get it in writing!

Any blank spaces on a printed form should be filled in with NA (Not Applicable) or NIL (nothing). Strike out anything you don't agree with, or ask that the contract be rewritten.

Remember, an estimate is not a contract.

Sometimes a contractor will include a "contingency clause" which allows for an extra fee if he experiences unexpected problems. For example, if you are having a skylight installed, the contractor may discover that the surrounding wood in the roof is too rotten to support the new construction. Because the contractor might have to replace a large portion of the roof before installing the skylight, his fee could be considerably higher than he expected.

Contingency clauses are perfectly acceptable. They're better than having the contractor give you a high estimate *in case* he runs into unexpected problems.

## Changing the contract

Change your mind about the flooring in your new addition? Are the patio doors you wanted not in stock?

No matter how carefully you prepare your contract, some changes or additions will almost always be necessary. For the protection of both you

### Contract Checklist

- ✓ Full names and addresses for yourself and the contractor. Make sure the firm you have been dealing with is the one named in the contract. Include its telephone number
- ✓ Definite starting and completion dates
- ✓ A detailed description, with sketches if appropriate, of the work to be done. Write in the quality and type of materials to be used. Include all work that is being subcontracted, such as plumbing and wiring
- ✓ The total price, including the amount of the down payment, if there is one, and the schedule of payments
- ✓ Assurance that the contractor will get all necessary permits and that all work will be done according to local codes. Ensure that inspections by local authorities will be done at the proper times
- ✓ A statement that the contractor is responsible for removing all debris as soon as construction is completed
- ✓ A statement that the contractor will repair or replace property damaged during the work
- ✓ A statement of all warranties, explaining what is covered, for how long, and what will be done if problems arise
- ✓ A statement of the contractor's public liability and property damage insurance
- ✓ Place and date of the contract
- ✓ The contractor's signature and your own

and the contractor, changes should only be made with:

- Written approval of the homeowner
- A signed statement from the contractor, giving the extra cost (or reduction)

If you are financing the work with a loan, check to see if the change must be approved by someone in the financial institution.

## If you want to cancel

When a written contract has been solicited, agreed upon and signed within your home, the Direct Sales Cancellation Act lets you cancel it without giving a reason. You must do so *no later than four days* after receiving your copy of the contract.

Write a letter of cancellation and deliver it personally or by mail. It's a good idea to use registered mail, which provides proof of the mailing date. (The notice of cancellation is considered to be given at the time of mailing.)

There may be other circumstances that give you the right to cancel a contract. Contact the nearest office of Alberta Consumer and Corporate Affairs for more information.

## Paying for the work

A down payment is seldom required on a routine home repair or improvement job. Even large projects are often done without a cash advance. If a down payment is required, make it as low as possible.

Most small jobs take no more than a few days to do, so payment is usually made after the work is completed.

If your project is large, the contractor will likely ask you to make "interim" payments (made in between starting and completion dates). *Make payments only for work that has been completed.* Always keep back some money to ensure the work is completed to your satisfaction.

Avoid "progression" clauses that call for payments at specific times, no matter how much work has been done. You could be left with an unfinished job.

Paying by cheque will give you a record of payment. If you don't have a chequing account, get a signed receipt from the contractor when the payment is made.

## Protect yourself from liens

If a contractor does not pay his suppliers and subcontractors, they can place *liens* on your property. A lien is a notice that someone is claiming a right to be paid out of the value of a particular piece of property. In other words, a lien means trouble!

If a lien is registered on your property, it will be difficult to mortgage or to sell your property until the lien is removed.

You can find out if a lien has been registered by checking your land title. These are kept on file at the Land Titles office. A title shows who owns the land and anyone else who claims to be entitled to a portion of the value of the land. You can get copies of property title records by paying a small fee.

### ▼ Holding back

You can protect yourself from a lien by doing some footwork. Before you make any payment, check your property title record at your nearest Land Titles office.

**Situation 1: If no lien has been registered**

1. From the bill provided, add up the value of the work or materials supplied up to the time the payment is made.
2. Calculate 15% of the total. (For example, 15% of an interim bill for $5,000 is $750.)
3. Pay the contractor the amount owing minus the 15%. ($5,000 minus $750 is $4,250.)
4. Keep the holdback money for 45 days after:
   - The work has been completed, or
   - The materials have been received, or
   - The contractor has given you written notice stating the renovation is ready for use.
5. After 45 days, check your title record at the Land Titles office.
6. If no lien has been registered, pay the holdback money to the contractor.

**Situation 2: If a lien has been registered**

1. Do not pay any money for the work or materials until the lien claim is settled.
2. Talk to a lawyer for advice on the best way to settle the claim and remove the lien from the title record.

## Two ways to remove liens

- You can either pay the money claimed or negotiate a smaller amount to settle the claim. When you pay the people who have registered liens, always ask them to sign "discharge" documents and file the discharges at the Land Titles office. A discharge will remove a lien from the property record.
- Go to court. This can be a simple way of having a lien removed, *if* you've handled holdbacks properly. If not, it can be expensive and frustrating.

## When is the job complete?

Don't be in a hurry to declare a job complete! Wait until everything you have been promised has been done before making the final payment, signing a completion certification, or any other document that releases the contractor from further responsibility.

If the contractor asks for immediate payment and assures you he will be back "in a few days to finish everything off," tell him his cheque will be ready then too.

## If you have problems

No matter how much care you've taken in selecting a contractor and preparing a contract, things can go wrong.

If the completion date passes or it seems that the contractor has abandoned the job, you can send a registered letter. Say that you are giving the contractor "X" number of days for the work to be completed. After that you will hire another contractor to complete the work, with money from the original contract. Do this only after you have received an estimate from another contractor. Be sure there's enough money from the contract for the work to be completed.

Remember that most disagreements can be settled through discussion and compromise. Be reasonable. Go over the contract calmly with the contractor and listen carefully to what he has to say. He may be right! Bear in mind that no home improvement job is flawless.

If you are still dissatisfied, talk to a knowledgeable friend. Or talk to a lawyer, if the disagreement is serious enough.

You can report unsatisfactory business practices to the nearest office of Alberta Consumer and Corporate Affairs. It will assist if laws have been broken. It may also suggest other ways to help you solve your problems.

If you think some of the work is not up to code standards, report it in writing to the right inspection department. If the work doesn't meet building code requirements, the contractor will have to correct it at his own expense.

The Better Business Bureau handles consumer inquiries and complaints.

## Protect yourself

Contracts for large home improvements can be complicated. If you're not sure of something in the contract, ask for an explanation. If you're still in doubt, take it to a lawyer.

The Lawyer Referral Service (call 263-5988 in Calgary or toll-free 1-800-332-1110 from elsewhere) will give you the names of three lawyers. You may arrange an appointment with one lawyer or with each lawyer. There is no charge for the first half hour of each appointment.

Don't feel discouraged if the protective steps outlined here sound like a lot of work for you, the homeowner. Many home improvement projects go smoothly and are satisfying for both the contractor and the homeowner. If you are realistic in your expectations, and take reasonable care in selecting a contractor and preparing a written contract, your project will likely be a success.

## For more information

For lien searches of land titles, write or visit the appropriate office; provide a legal description of the title you want searched and $2 per search. The Edmonton Land Titles Office files titles on properties from approximately Innisfail north; Calgary Land Titles Office files titles on property south of Innisfail.

If you live outside Calgary or Edmonton and require an immediate title search, you might get one done through your financial institution or law office. Many of them have accounts with Land Titles and can request searches by telephone. Expect to pay for the service.

Land Titles Office
J.J. Bowlen Building
620 – 7 Avenue SW
Calgary, Alberta
T2P 2R4
Telephone: 297-6511

Land Titles Office
10365 – 97 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T5J 3W7
Telephone: 427-2742

**Calgary 297-5700**
301 Centre 70
7015 Macleod Trail South
Box 5880, Postal Station A
Calgary, Alberta
T2H 2M9

**Camrose 679-1733**
Aspen Business Park
4911-47 Street
Camrose, Alberta
T4V 1J9

**Edmonton 427-5782**
3rd Floor, Capilano Centre
9945-50 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T6A 0L4

and

126 Pacific Rim Mall
9700-105 Avenue
Box 10
Edmonton, Alberta
T5H 4J1

**Fort McMurray 743-7231**
Provincial Building
5th Floor, West Tower
9915 Franklin Avenue
Fort McMurray, Alberta
T9H 2K4

**Grande Prairie 538-5400**
Provincial Building
10320- 99 Street
Box 7
Grande Prairie, Alberta
T8V 6J4

**Lethbridge 381-5360**
300 Professional Building
740-4 Avenue South
Bag Service 3014
Lethbridge, Alberta
T1J 4C7

**Medicine Hat 529-3535**
303 Provincial Building
770-6 Street S.W.
Medicine Hat, Alberta
T1A 4J6

**Peace River 624-6214**
Provincial Building
9621-96 Avenue
Bag 900, Box 9
Peace River, Alberta
T8S 1T4

**Red Deer 340-5241**
Provincial Building
4920-51 Street
Red Deer, Alberta
T4N 6K8